

# Curtain Call or Close Call? Exploring the Drama of Experimental and Mainstream Theater Audiences

Student Name: Szymon Zbiegniewski

Student Number: 667151

Supervisor: Frans Brouwer

MA Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract:

In this paper, I explore the distinction between experimental and mainstream theatre performance using cultural economic concepts and perspective to answer my research question: What factors affect ticket sales, audience participation, and motivation in Theater Rotterdam's experimental and lesser-known productions, and how does it compare to mainstream performance? I started with a literature review where I explored various concepts needed for a better understanding of the nature of performance art like theatre. For this research, I applied a survey research method that contained both quantitative and qualitative questions concerning preferences, motivation, experience, and impact, among others. I collected 144 responses in total from two types of theatre performances in Theater Rotterdam in April 2025. The first representing mainstream theatre was Hamlet directed by Erik Whien. The second group was from The Kitchen, which was a small-scale event in TR that contained three experimental performances. In total, I had 80 respondents for Hamlet and 66 for The Kitchen. In the analysis, I separated these answers into two datasets and then compared them to each other. Analysis of this thesis goes through all 19 questions of my survey, revealing trends and differences between these two groups. Later in the discussion, I recalled these recurring topics into six main themes that reveal specific characteristics of these two categories of performing arts. These themes are also compared to the literature review and concepts mentioned by other researchers. The main conclusion is that there are specific differences between visitor groups. They include their motivation, reasoning for attending the theatre, and goals for cultural and social capital.

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# 1. Introduction

Theater Rotterdam is a venue with many faces. It is an institution designed to be approachable for various types of visitors with different demographics (age, gender, education). At the beginning of this thesis, I want to present two performances that have taken place in Theater Rotterdam in recent years. In the 2014 and 2015 seasons, *The Fountainhead* was performed at Theater Rotterdam. It was a large-scale adaptation of Ayn Rand's novel directed by internationally recognized theatre maker Ivo van Hove. These events were nearly sold out, and the production became a landmark event for Rotterdam's performing arts scene. Theater Rotterdam also hosts a special event called *Welcome to Our Guesthouse* each season. This is a showcase event featuring around three different performances on various stages throughout the theatre venue. It is an experimental program that highlights emerging makers within an unconventional performance structure. Despite its bold vision and positive reviews, *Welcome to Our Guesthouse* often struggles with ticket sales. It also frequently remains largely unnoticed by the broader public, who tend to be more interested in large-scale performances.

## 1.1 Theater Rotterdam

The choice for Theater Rotterdam is also not coincidental. This institution stands out as a prominent cultural center on the map of the Netherlands. Specifically, it is a space that embraces both experimental and popular performances due to its specific vision. Since April 2020, Theater Rotterdam has had a new artistic leadership under Alida Dors. She started a new vision of this institution as a space for polyphony and multiformity (Dutch Culture, 2024). Her philosophy is summarized in a credo, "each one, teach one". She pushes the artist to learn from each other and share this knowledge with audiences. This philosophy led to a very innovative programming that connects theatre with dance, performance, music, and more. But more broadly fits both experimental and classical visions for the live performance.

## 1.2 Research Question

That is the main area of interest for my thesis. I want to compare these two types of performance to better understand visitors' motivation and participation within them. The contrast between this experimental and canon-based productions is a recurring challenge for cultural institutions like Theater Rotterdam. Well-known productions exist due to name recognition and public trust, while experimental performances often suffer from quality uncertainty and limited visibility. The situation is even more complicated due to the very high competition in the performing arts. It exists both externally (other venues presenting their own performances) and internally (other experimental and mainstream performances within Theater Rotterdam, but also major events made by outside organizations within Theater Rotterdam, like the International Film Festival Rotterdam). Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to better understand why visitors attend both types of shows. What drives them to experimental and mainstream performances, and what are the differences between these factors? The research question of this paper is: **What factors affect ticket sales, audience participation, and motivation in Theater Rotterdam's experimental and lesser-known productions, and how does it compare to mainstream performance?** The results that answer this question will explore factors like pricing models, word-of-mouth, emotional motivation, and others. I also created two separate profiles of visitors based on the results of this research.

## 1.3 Literature Overview

The structure of this thesis goes as follows. First, I start with a literature review that explores concepts necessary to move forward with my research. This review draws on a set of theoretical frameworks full of concepts connected with cultural economics. I begin with introducing a story of experimental theatre and a vision behind it. Then I move to the crucial concept of ephemeral and experience goods to describe the nature of theatre performances (products whose quality can be evaluated only after consumption and that happen only once). The consequence of experience and ephemeral good is a quality uncertainty, which starts the next paragraph. Here, I describe how the audience and theatre respond to uncertainty by

incorporating signaling theory. Signaling theory explores pricing strategies, branding, institutional reputation, and third-party motivations. Further review follows the concepts of cultural and social capital of Pierre Bourdieu. They help explain differences in attendance patterns between the two groups. It highlights the influence of education, familiarity with artists, and social background, among others, that shape individuals' cultural preferences. It is also supported by the theory of weak and strong ties, which explores how information and recommendations circulate within and beyond immediate cultural communities. I finalize the literature review with a motivation research overview and competition in cultural markets. Here I present how performance competes not only between but also within venues in a complex cultural ecosystem.

## 1.4 Methodology Overview

To explore the various factors influencing audience participation in different types of performances, I employ a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a structured survey administered to audience members after productions at Theater Rotterdam. The first was *Hamlet*, an all-time classic in a modern interpretation. The second was *The Kitchen*, a compilation of three experimental performances that took place over one week. The survey included both open and closed-ended questions. This combination allowed for statistical comparisons as well as thematic analyses of audience motivation, expectation, and experience. A total of 146 responses were gathered in the evenings after shows in April 2025. These responses formed the basis for a comparative case study highlighting the differences between these groups.

## 1.5 Contribution

I believe this research has both academic and practical contributions to studying participation in the performing arts. Theoretically, it offers an empirical grounded comparison of how different audiences respond to mainstream and experimental theatre, considering cultural economics and the analysis of ephemeral cultural goods. Practically, these findings provide insights useful for Theater Rotterdam and similar cultural institutions (or those who want to

emerge similarly). By identifying mechanisms, the study offers strategy insights for outreach, programming, and communication that can help in extending experimental work. On a personal level, now of writing this thesis, I work for Theater Rotterdam, and it is important for me to see it flourish and become more accessible to international visitors, like me. Experimental theatre is one of the solutions for inviting international citizens who do not speak Dutch into the theatre. But first, let us dive into the literature review.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Origin and Characteristics of Experimental Theatre

For a better understanding of the literature review of this paper, it is crucial to begin by defining and describing the concept of experimental theatre. The origin of experimental theatre comes from the new wave of performance avant-garde school (Schechner, 1985). Its main goal is to challenge traditional narratives, structure, and audience expectations. Characteristics of experimental theatre include non-linear storytelling and open-ended interpretation (Lehmann, 2006), unconventional staging that rejects commercial theater aesthetics (Aronson, 2015), blurring the line between performer and spectator that engages audiences emotionally and intellectually (Machon, 2013). Compared to mainstream theatre, experimental theatre's main mission is art for art's sake rather than financial profit. However, innovation over commercial viability leads to higher financial risks and audience uncertainty (Bial, 2004). And where mainstream theater aims for broad appeal, experimental theater often seeks a specific type of audience, such as culturally omnivorous consumers (Peterson & Kern, 1996).

### 2.2 The concept of ephemeral goods

Understanding the relationship between participation in the performing arts and economic concepts is crucial for establishing this theoretical framework. Many research papers have proven a strong correlation between these two concepts. The most influential and cited in the performance arts sphere is Towse's *Textbook of Cultural Economics: Economics of the*



*Performing Arts* (2010). Ruth Towse made a valuable categorization of putting performance arts into the experience goods category. Experience goods are products that can be evaluated only after their consumption. It is the idea that was first introduced as a “nobody-knows” phenomena by Richard Caves in *Creative Industries: Contracts Between Art and Commerce* (Towse, 2010; Caves, 2000). This category contrasts with search goods (which can be evaluated before purchase) and credence goods (whose value is difficult or impossible to assess even after consumption). Theatre performances are an example of experience goods because a theatre visitor cannot fully judge a performance until they watch it. Reviews or trailers help, but the experience remains subjective.

However, the concept of experience goods does not fully capture the image of theatre performance. A specific subcategory of experience goods conveys the theatre genre with more details. It is an ephemeral good. The concept of ephemera was first assigned to temporary items that are meant to be destroyed rather than collected. The examples of ephemera are fliers, newspapers, menus, and objects not meant to be stored. The etymology of the word ephemeral comes from the Greeks and means “lasting only one day” (Oxford Reference, 2006). This concept implies the temporality of objects. In the example of performance arts, ephemeral goods occur and are consumed only in specific moments. They cannot be consumed the same way again because each performance will be experienced differently, considering the performance itself and the visitor profile (Wasserman, 2020). However, this description also matches the definition of experience goods. What is unique about performance art as a type of ephemeral goods is that the experimental performance will happen only once in a specific form because performance art is non-repeatable. The difference is visible by comparing film as an experience good and theatre as an ephemeral good. Both products can only be evaluated after consumption. However, film is a good that can be consumed again in an identical manner since it's a pre-recorded art piece. Theatre performance (if it is not recorded) exists only in the moment when it happens.

The nature of ephemeral goods has consequences for a different economic concept – scarcity-driven demand. From the neoclassical economic perspective, scarcity-driven demand means that limited supply can raise demand and perceived value (Marshall, 1890). Becker

(1991) continues this thought, adding that scarcity makes products more desirable due to social influences on pricing. A performing arts perspective on scarcity-driven demand begins with Baumol and Bowen's work on Baumol's Cost Disease. The paper presents that performing arts struggle with costs and limited availability, indirectly reinforcing scarcity-driven demand. (Baumol, Bowen, 1966). However, this situation creates a paradox. Experimental theatre, due to its ephemeral nature, should be labelled as scarce and consequently drive to high ticket sales for this kind of performance. Then why do institutions like Theater Rotterdam sometimes struggle to sell enough tickets for their experimental performances? (Brilli, Gemini, 2018; Thamkulangkool, 2021; Lindinger et al., 2013).

## 2.3 Quality uncertainty of performance arts

Another crucial characteristic of ephemeral goods, next to their non-repeatable nature, is their bond with quality uncertainty. Performances are “one-off” experiences. Usually, when they are released, visitors lack the chance to depend on prior consumption reviews compared to reproducible cultural goods such as books or films. Therefore, visitors must rely on other forms of trust mechanisms. DiMaggio & Stenberg (1985) illustrate other forms of trust mechanisms that are more adjusted to performing arts. They include word-of-mouth and reputation (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Caves, 2000). They also argue that institutions like Theater Rotterdam function as reputation brokers. They mitigate the quality uncertainty by being an image of quality from a national perspective. The other mentioned concept that mitigates the quality uncertainty is Word of Mouth. It refers to the informal exchange of information and recommendations between individuals about products and services (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Since assessing the objective quality of performances is difficult and sometimes even impossible; consumers of performance arts must rely on trust resources – family, friends, and their cultural circles. Word of Mouth is not just an exchange of information between agents but a social phenomenon (Brown and Reingen, 1987). Brown and Reingen also illustrate that word of mouth is working on weak ties (acquaintances) and strong ties (friends and families), both having different goals to achieve. Granovetter (1983) argues that weak ties, also in word-of-mouth phenomena, are crucial for introducing new

cultural products to a broader network. For experimental theatre, particularly, these connections are important for reaching a potential audience that is not a part of the core visitors group of the theatre.

Trust mechanisms can be further developed and analyzed through the signaling theory framework proposed by Michael Spence (1973). Signaling theory presents signaling as the act of sharing credible information about quality when there is asymmetric information (Spence, 1973). In the case of theatre institutions like Theater Rotterdam, several signaling theories correspond to DiMaggio's trust mechanism. A few signaling strategies I already mentioned above (Theater Rotterdam as a cultural broker is a credible signal of quality). Another signal incorporated by Theater Rotterdam is Third-party endorsements as certifications of an artistic job (Spence, 1973), a strategy which is visible for the shows that already had their premiere. When entering an agenda and looking at the descriptions of performances, a potential visitor can find reviews made by prestigious theatre reviewers such as the Volkskrant or the Theaterkrant newspapers.

The last trust mechanism worth mentioning is pricing strategies. In a signal theory, price functions as a quality heuristic (Spence, 1973). Within the theatre world, high and low prices can have drastically different meanings. For example, the high price of a performance can create the so-called Veblen Effect (Veblen, 1899). The Veblen Effect assumes that the demand for goods will rise with the rise of their price, which contrasts with the law of demand. In the case of theatre institutions, operas and ballets are sometimes priced higher to create the Veblen Effect, an image of something worth more money, and to signal the quality of performance. However, low pricing does not suggest the opposite in the theatre industry. Other pricing strategies that give space for lower prices and that Theater Rotterdam preserves are price discrimination (based on consumer characteristics like age) and price differentiation (based on seating location, performance time, or popularity). These strategies mean a variety of pricing depending on demand, scarcity, popularity, and visitors' willingness to pay. When buying a ticket for Hamlet via the Theater Rotterdam website, a visitor sees different price caps depending on their situation (Figure 1). Hamlet offers a tiered pricing model based on

seat location (rangs 1–4), and additional discounts for youth, and culture card holders (TR Pas, Rotterdampas).

In contrast, The Kitchen experimental performances employed a “pay what you want” strategy. They allowed visitors to select between 5, 10, and 15 euros regardless of seat position. This strategy aligns with the egalitarianism of experimental performance and makes it more accessible for people with entry barriers. In both cases, pricing becomes a part of the symbolic identity of production (Langeveld, 2014). Theoretical extension of signaling provides a clearer framework for understanding how audiences navigate ephemeral goods and make decisions based on signals rather than direct experience (Brilli, Gemini, 2018; Chen, Zhao, 2024; Scollen, 2009).

Rang 1+		Standaard	€ 27,00
Standaard	€ 35,00	TR Pas	€ 22,00
TR Pas	€ 30,00	Rotterdampas	€ 22,00
Rotterdampas	€ 30,00	t/m 30 jaar	€ 12,50
Rang 1		Rang 3	
Standaard	€ 31,00	Standaard	€ 23,00
TR Pas	€ 26,00	TR Pas	€ 18,00
Rotterdampas	€ 26,00	Rotterdampas	€ 18,00
t/m 30 jaar	€ 12,50	t/m 30 jaar	€ 12,50
Rang 2		Rang 4	
Standaard	€ 27,00	Standaard	€ 13,50
TR Pas	€ 22,00	TR Pas	€ 13,50
Rotterdampas	€ 22,00	Rotterdampas	€ 13,50
t/m 30 jaar	€ 12,50	t/m 30 jaar	€ 12,50

Fig. 1 - An example of price differentiation and price discrimination of Theater Rotterdam

## 2.4 Cultural capital and the exchange of it

The first part of this literature review explored the theatre side of concepts that influence ticket sales and audience participation in experimental performances. In this paragraph, I leave the supplier side of a market and look at the demanders of experimental theatre - visitors. The next concept crucial for the analysis of this research is cultural capital. First introduced by Pierre Bourdieu in 1984, cultural capital is a key determinant of cultural consumption patterns. Cultural capital gathers non-financial social assets needed for the

consumption of cultural products. These include education, taste, familiarity with cultural norms, and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1984).

In the context of theatre attendance, cultural capital influences audience preferences, especially for experimental productions that require a higher level of cultural capital to understand unconventional artistic expression. Conversely, individuals with lower cultural capital may find experimental performances unapproachable or intimidating. They prefer mainstream productions that align with familiar cultural norms (Bourdieu, 1984). This distinction is visible within the Theater Rotterdam institution, where both types of performances are available for visitors. Bourdieu also argues that a lack of cultural capital evolves into a barrier to entry (1984). Not being able to evaluate and process experimental theatre leads to exclusion and uncertainty.

Cultural capital is a crucial factor in navigating quality uncertainty (Caves, 2000). High cultural capital audiences are better equipped to evaluate artistic merit and rely on the reputation of institutions like Theater Rotterdam. They mitigate perceived risk better. And lastly, cultural capital is strongly bonded with the word-of-mouth concept (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Word-of-mouth tends to circulate within networks sharing similar cultural capital. The word-of-mouth mechanism is unavailable to use for visitors with low levels of cultural capital.

Cultural capital is also strongly connected with the concept of Omnivorousness. Classic Bourdieu's definition suggests that cultural capital is formed by consuming only legitimate culture (fine arts, operas, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1985). However, cultural omnivore theory points out that elite status and broad cultural capital come not only from consuming "high art" but from cultural wideness (Peterson, Kern, 1996). Therefore, from the institution's perspective, it is desirable to host 'omnivore' visitors because they can accumulate cultural capital differently and are more adaptable to gathering social capital as well. A broader cultural portfolio enhances visitors' ability to exchange cultural capital across social groups and contexts. This is why Theater Rotterdam explores both performances that could be labelled as high and low culture, but also different types of events, including hosting international film festivals, circus festivals, and music festivals. Diversity in programming supports both

organizations in the form of creating a network, but also visitors in shaping their cultural capital through omnivorousness.

Therefore, for the sake of this research, it is desirable to explore the correlation between visitors being cultural omnivores and their participation in attending experimental theatre. I want to ask questions that will address whether omnivorous audiences drive participation. I believe that surveying audience motivations examines if openness to diverse cultural forms correlates with attendance at lesser-known productions.

## 2.5 Motivation and Engagement in Performing Arts

Going further with the visitors' perspective, we should not forget about their reasoning for attending the experimental performances in the first place. In this paragraph, I explore three different motivations of visitors to engage with experimental theatre performances. They are categorized into several key aspects that highlight the uniqueness of such performances. The first motivation is emotional engagement. Many visitors seek emotional experiences because they value the impact and depth of feelings that experimental theatre can evoke (Walmsley, 2011). Whether happiness, discomfort, or deep introspection, experimental performances can encourage audience members to discuss and recommend other shows. Therefore, emotional engagement opens gates for sharing and fostering word-of-mouth processes (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). From the Theater Rotterdam perspective, emotional engagement is a motive that can be and is supported with various strategies. A lot of performances offer post-show discussions that give the audience space to explore their emotional perspective on a piece they have just experienced.

Another motivation is a need for cultural exploration. Cultural participation can be understood as an act of identity formation. In this formation, individuals express belonging to subcultures or avant-garde (Bennett, 1999). Audiences often attend to learn about cultures that are undiscovered for them yet, and that concern culture, geographically and locally speaking. For example, in research made by Kim et al. (2018), Japanese tourists who attended performances in Korea stated that cultural curiosity played a significant role in deciding on activities to do (Kim et al., 2018). Another research proved that the desire to experience

authentic cultural expressions can drive engagement, enhancing life satisfaction and broadening perspectives (Yang & Lu, 2024). Cultural exploration is also connected with cultural omnivorousness. Audiences that engage with experimental theater do so as a form of cultural distinction. Cultural distinction reinforces omnivorousness (Peterson, 1992) as a status marker. Theater Rotterdam already explores how to use visitors' cultural motivation in creating their programming. For instance, using a filter in an agenda that only shows performances “made in Rotterdam”. These performances specifically target audiences interested in exploring local ways of making performances.

The last motivation to mention here is social interaction and seeing theatre as a communal experience. Experimental theatre often creates a unique social environment that encourages interaction among attendees and between performers and the audience. In 2018, Christopher Stein conducted ethnographic research that explored the motivation of visitors to attend Performance Bar Rotterdam. The Performance Bar was a space for personal expression and a promise of surprise. This event allowed visitors to engage in playful, improvisational activities that fostered a sense of community, self-reflection, and transformative learning (Stein, 2018). Consequently, visitors felt they belonged to a specific group that shared similar values and interests. Social interaction is correlated with Granövetter's weak-tie theory (Granövetter, 1973). Social networks are crucial for spreading information and driving cultural participation and eventually extend the group of cultural omnivores interested in experimental theatre. Theater Rotterdam fosters social interaction by offering specific discounts for social groups. For instance, visitors who are members of Podiumpas, We Are Public Pass, or Rotterdampas can receive a special discount for some of the performances. That is how Theater Rotterdam tries to connect people with similar interests but also invites to exchange different preferences with various audiences.

## 2.6 Competition in the cultural sector

Cultural organizations face competitive environments, particularly in attracting audiences. These institutions are pushed to compete for audience attention over a wide range of alternatives. What's more, McCarthy et al. (2001) suggest that competition is not only external between organizations but also internal, especially for venues that offer distinct

forms of art. These organizations compete within their programming to attract audiences. Theater Rotterdam is an example of an institution that also struggles with internal competition. There are two types of performance inside it. One is the big stage (Grote Zaal) that can hold around 800 visitors. The other categories include a small stage (Kleine Zaal) and a studio. These two rooms can hold around 150 visitors each. Grote Zaal is a space for nationally popular performances and is often sold out. Other spaces, although sometimes presenting mainstream performances, are spaces for lesser-known, experimental performances. McCarthy also argues that audience participation in cultural events is shaped by the availability of substitute activities (2001). Audiences are not only choosing between cultural experiences (for instance, a large theater production and an art exhibition) but also between cultural and non-cultural activities, such as streaming services or dining out. Specifically for the institution in focus, for Theater Rotterdam, large-scale international performances with higher visibility may overshadow smaller experimental productions.

In a different paper, Kath Bicknell argues that competition is shaped by evolving expectations and engagement dynamics (2014). Audiences are not passive observers anymore. They actively participate in the evaluation and appreciation of performances, influenced by factors such as interactivity, emotional connection, and social context (Bicknell, 2014). Therefore, it is not enough for creators to produce an exceptional performance, but it is also crucial how they communicate with the public (with promotion and marketing, among others). Bicknell also discusses the shift towards an emotion- and experience-based economy in performing arts. Audiences prioritize personal engagement and emotional resonance over traditional metrics of quality. The last point of a competition argument is that the success of a performance relates to its engagement with the local community (Bicknell, 2014). Organizations can differentiate themselves in a competitive environment by engaging with local audiences and addressing their specific needs.

## 2.7 The meaning of the theoretical framework for this research

In this chapter, I presented some concepts crucial for exploring my research question from different perspectives. First, the focus of this research revolves around the concept of ephemeral goods. It is central for this thesis to understand how audiences perceive and



navigate the dynamic of ephemeral goods. With word-of-mouth, it is crucial to understand if and how it influences ticket sales in institutions like Theater Rotterdam. In a paper *A Theatre Attendance Model*, Michele Bisceglia argues for the effectiveness of an inductive reasoning model for decision-making (2017). This model means that agents (visitors) determine their preferences based on the outcomes of other experimental performances, which allows for adaptive behavior in response to the actions of others. This research also explores how competition (both external and internal) impacts audience participation in Theater Rotterdam's productions. Lastly, I want to explore how concepts and amounts of cultural capital shape and matter in a case of audience engagement and participation in experimental performances.

So, to summarize all I mentioned above, the empirical research will build on several interconnected concepts. First, trust mechanisms have a central role in institutions like Theater Rotterdam use signals to reduce uncertainty for the audience. Signals include pricing strategies, the director/performers' reputation, and symbolic cues offered by the program or venue. Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) helps in explaining how visitors make decisions to watch the performances despite the characteristics of ephemeral goods like live theatre (Brilli & Gemini, 2018). My analysis also incorporates the differences between mainstream and experimental theatre. Not only in the aesthetics categories, but mostly in how they differ in signaling and communicating with their audiences, and what cultural offerings they imply. Experimental theatre is often associated with innovation, exploring nature, and a non-linear approach. Mainstream performances, on the other hand, offer a link to familiarity and the tradition of performing arts with broader public recognition. Lastly, the concept of signal is strongly visible in pricing strategies. Pricing in the form of price differentiation and discrimination (Langeveld, 2014) adds an economic dimension to the understanding of visitors' motivation and participation. The visual diagram below shows how these ideas interrelate.

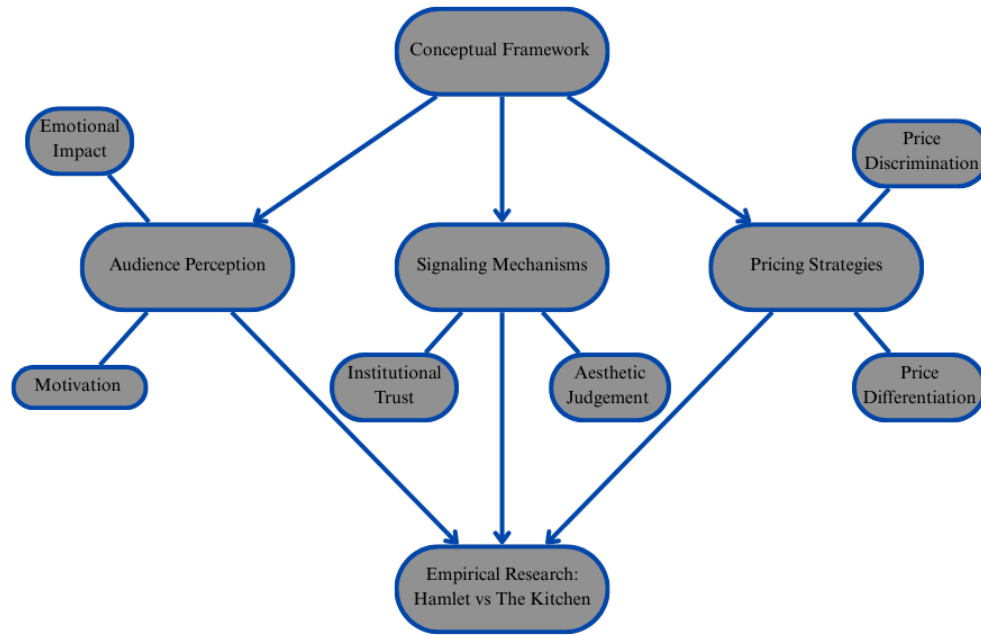


Fig. 2 - The visualization of literature concepts made in Canva

## 3 Methodology structure

### 3.1 Research Design

My master's research employs a comparative case study approach. The goal of it is to answer the research question of **“What factors affect ticket sales, audience participation, and motivation in Theater Rotterdam’s experimental and lesser-known productions, and how does it compare to mainstream performance?”** by examining audience behavior. It is a comparative case study because I want to analyze two performances that take place in season 2024-2025 in Theater Rotterdam. The first one I label as a popular performance is a Hamlet reinterpretation directed by Erik Whien. The second one are performances from a special event called “The Kitchen”, created by Bart Huiskens and Sheree Lenting, programmers of Theater Rotterdam. These performances are accessible to non-Dutch speakers. Comparative case studies are particularly useful in a social research context because they allow for in-depth research of differences and similarities across different cases

(Bryman, 2016) They help to reveal structural patterns and causalities. In the context of my research, this approach provides insights into whether audiences' motivations and participation vary between different types of performances.

The logic behind this comparison is in the specific characteristics of popular (Hamlet) and experimental (The Kitchen) performances. Popular productions benefit from characteristics like name recognition, canon status of a drama, and established visitors' expectations. These characteristics lead to higher ticket prices but also higher sales, which is one example of the Veblen Effect I mentioned before (Veblen, 1899). In contrast, experimental productions challenge conventional storytelling. They attract niche audiences and face higher marketing and financial risks (Bial, 2004). By comparing these two types of performances, this study determines the extent to which cultural capital, pricing strategies, and social networks influence theater attendance.

The source of my primary data in this research comes from a survey-based approach. I surveyed attendees for both popular and experimental performances (Appendix 1). Surveys include both closed (demographic data, price sensitivity, etc.) and open-ended questions (perceived value, emotional impact). Mixed method strategy like this ensures quantitative insights into preference that can be calculable and qualitative, describing the perception of theatre goes at the same time. I want this study to contribute to a better understanding of audience segmentation and what engagement strategies Theater Rotterdam can apply to the performing arts sector.

### 3.2 Case Selection

At the beginning of the explanation of case selection, it is designated to present Theater Rotterdam (TR) and explain its role on the socio-cultural map of Rotterdam and the Netherlands. Theater Rotterdam (known before as Rotterdamse Schouwburg) is not only a theatre institution but functions more as a culture hub in the city center of Rotterdam. TR holds a focal position in the city's cultural landscape. It is a space for theatre, dance,

performance, music, debates, open mics, movie screenings, and more (Dutchculture, 2024). But it is also more than a venue. Theater Rotterdam is actively engaged with the local communities through education, workshops, and programs (Theater Rotterdam, 2025). These activities create a deeper appreciation and connection with art and community. Alida Dors, the current artistic director of Theater Rotterdam, reformed the ethos of this institution to learning by doing and the 'each one, teach one' philosophy (Theater Rotterdam, 2025).

The rationale for picking Theater Rotterdam and performances within it is grounded in the theoretical framework I discussed above in the literature review and personal connections with that institution. The choice of performances is also connected with the framework. Canonical shows like Hamlet benefit from their name recognition and their authors. This leads to greater audience familiarity and lower perceived risk (Bourdieu, 1984; Veblen, 1899). They are more likely to attract a general audience that drives higher ticket sales. In contrast, experimental performances (such as Shaking Shame, one of The Kitchen performances) lack the recognizability and appeal to niche, more culturally invested audiences. They pose a greater perceived risk and face challenges like limited financial support (Bial, 2004). Therefore, these two contrasting performances have the potential to support a literature argument about differences between them and between the audiences they attract.

### 3.2.1 Erik's Whien Hamlet

Shakespeare's Hamlet is an all-time classic of the performing arts. Hamlet is one of the most well-known and performed plays in Western theatre history. Both on stage and in movie adaptations. In Whien's adaptation, the narration focuses on young Hamlet portrayed by Roman Derwig. He mourns his father while his surroundings seem emotionless. His mother, Queen Gertrude, played by acclaimed actress Hannah Hoekstra, immediately remarries Hamlet's uncle, the brother of a king. This event leads to Hamlet's spiral of anger and self-destruction. Hamlet has been scheduled for performances in Theater Rotterdam between 2 and 5 April 2025. Despite its novelty, I prescribe Hamlet as a popular performance due to its characteristics. First, the main themes of Hamlet (revenge, grief) are universally understood. Therefore, they are understood by both frequent theatregoers and newcomers.

Second, it still follows a traditional narrative structure despite some contemporary interpretations. Also, this Hamlet was created by an established director and actors. Erik Whien is a well-regarded director known for his text-driven productions rather than radical approaches. Within Theater Rotterdam, he directed adaptations of “Revolutionary Road” and “A Case for the Existence of God”. Both are spoken-word theatre. Lastly, Hamlet had a big promotion budget. Posters of the performance were all around Rotterdam, which increased its visibility and ticket sales.

### 3.2.2 The Kitchen Performances

In the early stage of my research, before collecting data, I decided to pick one experimental performance (Language: No Problem) and then compare it to mainstream Hamlet. However, in the meantime, I received access to the database of Theater Rotterdam, and I was able to check ticket sales for this performance. I discovered that the amount of ticket sales, which was the population for my research, is not sufficient. I needed to extend my collection size to other performances. Fortunately, Language: No Problem was not a “solo” experimental performance. It was a part of The Kitchen. The Kitchen is an initiative that takes place a few times per season in a Krijn Boon Studio, the smallest stage in Theater Rotterdam. It is a space for growing not-yet-recognizable performers to practice their craft. Visitors are more immersed not only in the performance but with the theater itself. The route to the studio leads through the backstage of Theater Rotterdam. As Theater Rotterdam describes on their website, “Discover fresh theater recipes, surprising flavors, and an exciting blend of styles” (Theater Rotterdam, 2025). Also, all the Kitchen performances have a tag “language no problem”. This means that they are accessible to the same extent to every visitor who attends the show. And the Kitchen visit is not only a performance. Theater Rotterdam also offers a complimentary drink in a discussion space and a chance to meet the creators. One of the Kitchen shows also organized zine-making workshops during the after-talk. I attended and collected survey responses during the last edition of The Kitchen in the season 2024/25 (between 22 and 25 April 2025). This edition contained three completely different performances that I will break down below.

### *3.2.2.1 Person Longing for Human*

Person Longing for Human is a performance created by the young, inspiring director Charles Pas, exploring the human desire for deep connection with others. Through dynamic lights and choreography, three dancers explore various perspectives on longing, connecting, disconnecting, and how the environment influences each. At the same time, the scenography and accessories used for these performances are very restricted. They only used matches and a syrup bucket to enhance the choreography and soundtrack. Performers portray the body as constantly possessed by Eros, the Greek god of love (Theater Rotterdam, 2025). Person Longing for Human got critically acclaimed by different critics. Theaterkrant, the largest Dutch platform about performance art, wrote “A sweetly strong piece of work with which Charles Pas both stupefies and intoxicates. Tastes like more and mead ” (Chotoe, 2023)

### *3.2.2.2 Shaking Shames*

Shaking Shames shines as the most experimental performance out of the two mentioned in The Kitchen Edition. It is an intimate yet thunderous performance about taboo and themes that are often avoided in public discourse, which is bodily pleasure. In this performance, visitors enter the studio where five naked performers dance to energetic techno music. Visitors circle the performers, and then the music stops to create a silence that is as loud as the music. There is no strict narration throughout the performance. Performers immerse themselves with the audience, often by standing next to them and pretending they also came here to see the show. What was fascinating about Shaking Shame was the interplay between the audience and performers. Melyn Chow, the creator of Shaking Shame, asks us one crucial question that should lead the audience throughout the show: Can we break free from the discomfort and shame surrounding physical pleasure? (Theater Rotterdam, 2025)

### *3.2.2.3 Language: No Broblem*

Language: No Broblem is a performance that explores the complexities of multilingualism. It examines how speaking multiple languages acts as a navigational tool. It encourages audiences to reflect on the role of language in shaping experiences and communities. Language: No Broblem follows a non-traditional narrative structure, moving between languages, geographies, and voices. This approach disrupts standard storytelling methods and alters traditional conventions of space and time (Theater Rotterdam, 2025). This performance

is a collaboration between emerging director Marah Haj Hussein and Monty, another young producer. This showcases a need for collective creation in experimental performances, blending various artistic disciplines and perspectives.

### 3.3 Data Collection Method

To understand the factors that influence ticket sales and audience participation in experimental performances at Theater Rotterdam, this study employs a survey-based approach. It is designed to compare mainstream performances with experimental performances, which have been analyzed later. In the case of survey distribution, I want to maximize my response rate. The survey has been distributed to attendees of both performances. Hamlet is shown four times between 2 and 5 April 2025 in a smaller location of Theater Rotterdam and four times on the main stage between 24 and 27 April 2025. The Kitchen performances took place between April 22 and April 25. First, it was two times Language: No Problem on 22 and 23 of April. Then Person Longing for Human on 24 April, and Finally Shaking Shame on 25 April. In the preparation process, I wanted to employ multiple distribution methods in collaboration with Theater Rotterdam. That included QR codes at the venue where performances took place, post-show emails, and paper surveys. I wanted to display QR codes at entry/exit points and encourage attendees to scan and complete the survey on their phones. I discussed with Theater Rotterdam representatives to receive access to the email book. Then, together, we could have sent a message to ticket holders after the performance with a link to the survey. The last old-school method was supposed to be paper surveys. This method was supposed to be specifically useful for older theatre goers who refuse or avoid filling out digital surveys. However, in the end, the collection method was restricted to QR codes. It was impossible to get access to an email address and online distribution. Also, the way I designed the survey made it difficult to print, so I also abandoned this method. The method I was left with was QR codes. However, just printing and leaving QR codes was not sufficient because visitors do not pay attention to researching this way. After each show, I was walking with a QR code in hand and explaining to visitors the purpose of my research. There was one possible risk from this process, which Bryman calls non-random sampling (Bryman, 2016). If I had decided whom I ask to fill out

the survey, then there would be some kind of selection of respondents, which is problematic for a random sample of visitors. Therefore, I applied a few methods suggested by Bryman to avoid sample bias. First, I employed a systematic approach to make it more quasi-random (Bryman, 2016). I applied time-based sampling where I approached people only for a specific 30 minutes after the show. Secondly, I avoided the “approachable” filter (Bryman, 2016). It required leaving my comfort zone of talking to people like me. Naturally, I would approach people who share my demographics or age, but with this research, I tried to rotate whom I approach. These ideas helped avoid bias. However, it is important to mention that due to the nature of in-person collection, this sample is a non-probability convenience sample.

The survey aims to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights, providing more in-depth observations. The survey consists of closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions to capture qualitative reflections on the participants' experiences. It follows six main themes. The first theme is demographics, including age, gender, education level, nationality, the performance attended (Hamlet or The Kitchen performances), and previous theater attendance to understand audience composition. Next, I explore motivations for attendance, which are factors that influence ticket purchases, such as interest in the play, director, cast, genre, or word-of-mouth recommendations. The next theme is price sensitivity and willingness to pay. Here, I ask about perceptions of ticket pricing, reactions to Theater Rotterdam’s price discrimination and differentiation, and how cost influences attendance. I also inquire about marketing exposure to learn how audience members discovered the performance (social media, theater website, recommendations, word of mouth). Additionally, I want to learn more about visitors’ emotional engagement and social interaction, which can be explored through open questions about the impact of the performance on audience emotions, engagement with themes, and the communal aspect of attending the theater. The final theme covers the prospects with Theater Rotterdam and audience recommendations. It is important to assess whether attendees would return for similar productions and their willingness to recommend the performance to others. With these themes, I can analyze differences in audience behavior and compare them between different types of performances.



I also distributed the same survey for visitors attending Hamlet and The Kitchen, as this approach will maximize comparability options.

### 3.4 Data analysis

For the analysis of this data, I apply a few different approaches. Since data collection employs both quantitative and qualitative methods, similarly, analysis will also employ both quantitative and qualitative methods.

#### 3.4.1 Survey Structure

For the quantitative part of this research, I employ descriptive statistical methods. First, closed-ended survey responses will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns and trends in audience behavior. For that purpose, I use several key metrics. These metrics were already grouped in the survey, and now they will work as paragraph titles for different aspects of motivation and participation. The first metric is Awareness & Ticket Purchase Behavior. In this metric, I check the percentage of respondents influenced by factors such as the director, cast, genre, or word-of-mouth recommendations. I also asked here about purchase behavior (whether visitors buy tickets in advance or not). The next one is Price Sensitivity and Perceived Value. Here, I want to calculate the proportion of attendees affected by ticket pricing models, including willingness to pay for similar future performances, and whether the price of a performance reflects the value of the experience. Another metric is Experience and Emotional Impact. In this section, I break down what stood out the most for the visitors in the performance they attended and their level of engagement. Then I asked if they would recommend the show they visited and why. The next metric measures Social and Cultural Capital Influence. Here I ask if visitors were familiar with the play/director before they attended, how regularly they attend similar performances, and if theatre is an important part of their social life. The next metric is Barriers to Attendance and Engagement. A mix of closed and open-ended questions checks what factors prevent visitors from attending performances more often and what would make them more likely to attend more experimental performances (if they want to). The last metrics concern post-performance Reflections and Future Engagement. Another mix of open and closed-ended questions asks whether visitors would attend a similar performance again and how Theater Rotterdam can

improve its outreach or programming to engage a larger audience. Descriptive statistics (such as patterns, trends, motivations, demographics) are employed on these metrics to identify key audience characteristics, including age distribution, education level, and ticket purchasing behavior.

### 3.4.2 Quantitative analysis

Earlier in the pre-research stage of this thesis, I considered analyzing my data with an inferential statistical test to compare responses between two different groups. A tool that was supposed to help me in this process was SPSS software. However, during the analysis process, I concluded the nature of these datasets. They are convenience samples (Bryman, 2016). This means they have very few generalizability characteristics. Therefore, conclusions from this research cannot be generalized to a greater population but are meant to work as a suggestion for future research that will generalize broadly. Moreover, it does not mean that a comparison between The Kitchen and Hamlet visitors is not possible. With the Qualtrics filter, I was able to separate answers for two dashboards – one that contains only Hamlet responses and the other one with only The Kitchen responses. The nature of the dataset and research goals (focused on audience motivations, perceptions, and engagement patterns) are possible to address using descriptive statistics. These descriptive statistics were easily generated and visualized using the built-in tools of Qualtrics. The primary aim of this research is exploratory rather than hypothesis-testing. Therefore, I resigned from applying inferential statistics analysis methods such as the Chi-square or correlation test. They are not essential for answering my research question. My methodological approach prioritizes analytical depth and relevance instead of the use of advanced analytical software.

### 3.4.3 Qualitative Analysis

Next to the quantitative report, I will post-code and analyze qualitative data. The qualitative part of my thesis functions as a supportive argument for quantitative analysis and as an independent argument for one section of a survey. Open-ended questions from the survey will be analyzed using thematic analysis to find key patterns and differences in perceptions of the audience. To conduct a thematic analysis, I use Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis

software. Based on the preliminary data review, I code responses into three major themes. These themes are based on a question description and reviewed with responses made by visitors. The first theme is the reason for attending. This theme will explore how motivations differ between mainstream and experimental theater audiences. It is based on the questions, “What influenced your decision to attend this performance?” and “What did you expect from the performance before you attended it?” Next, I dive into emotional impact. The question about impact should unpack how each performance influenced audience engagement, immersion, and post-show discussions. Questions that concern this theme are why visitors would (or wouldn’t) recommend the show to others. The last theme concerns perceived risks of experimental and mainstream theatre. I believe there are concerns and/or hesitations that might scare audiences away from attending non-mainstream or mainstream productions. Questions that concern this theme are “What would make you more likely to attend experimental performances?” and “How could Theater Rotterdam improve its outreach or programming to engage more audiences?” Additionally, a supportive qualitative analysis will be used for a closed-ended question that has the “other” option. Here, many visitors made valid points that need to be analyzed separately from quantitative analysis.

Quantitative and qualitative data will be brought together through a triangulation process (Bryman, 2016). It means that the information from open-ended questions will be used to contextualize or contrast the survey data patterns. For example, a quantitative analysis argument can be supported and contextualized with a citation from an open-ended question. The qualitative response will help in explaining the underlying reasons or perceptions. Mixed methods research strategy like this strengthens the overall analysis and link different narratives. It helps to answer not only “what” questions but also “why” (Bryman, 2016).

### 3.5 Demographics of my sample

The sample of this research consists of 146 valid responses (n=146) collected between 2 and 27 April 2025 after performances at Theater Rotterdam (Fig. 3). The sample consists of 80 respondents who attended the classical theatre performance of Hamlet and 66 who attended the experimental theatre performance of The Kitchen. The combined age range of

performance is between 16 and 75. However, there is a visible difference in age distribution between these two groups. I used AI in the process of making this graph since it was much easier to create age groups this way and put them on a graph. I refer to this in the AI declaration (Appendix 2). Hamlet's audience skewed older. A higher concentration of respondents is in their 40s to 60s. The experimental group is significantly younger.

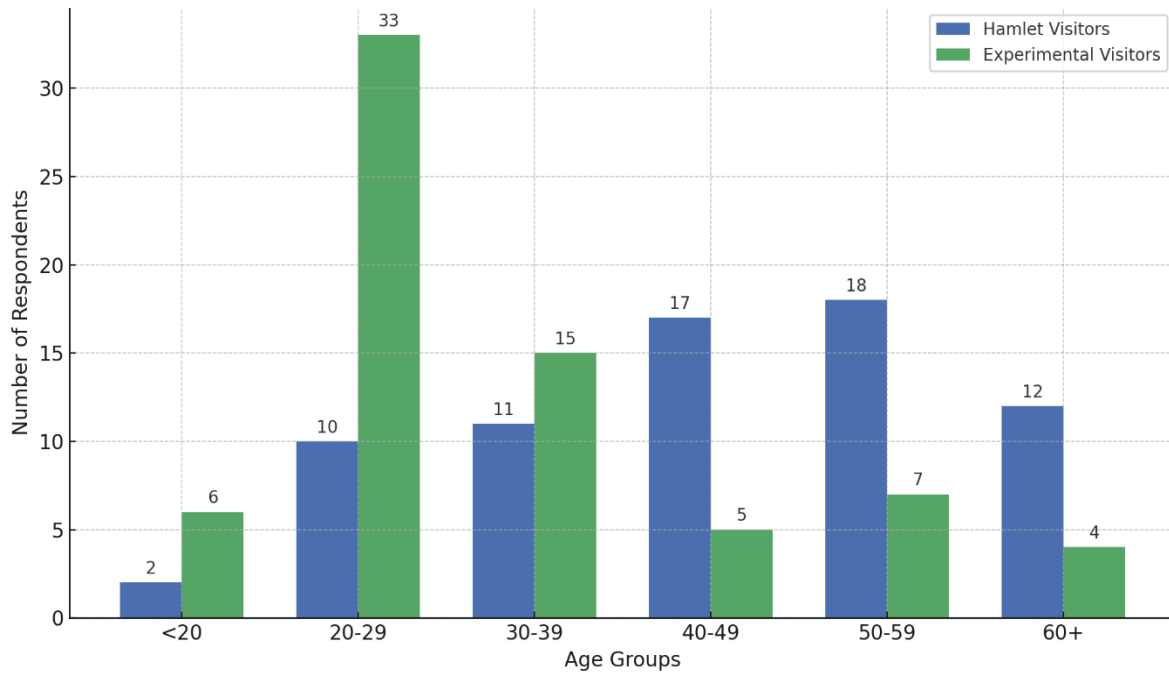


Fig. 3 - Demographic graph of my sample

Most of it is between the 20s and 30s. Both groups follow similar gender identity patterns with a dominance of female audience. 66% of the Hamlet sample identify as a woman, 31% as a man, and 3% as other. Similarly, 59% of experimental visitors identify as women, 38% as a man, and the rest as other. In terms of education, the percentage of visitors holding a master's degree is higher with Hamlet (up to 53% compared to 38% for experimental visitors). However, for any higher education degree, both types of publics are around 85%. In case of nationality vast majority of both samples are Dutch nationals, with a slight difference in the experimental sample. For Hamlet, 95% of the people asked were Dutch, with only 4 identifying as internationals. For the experimental audience, 71% identify as Dutch while 29% identify as internationals. For both samples, around 67% of respondents live in

Rotterdam, but almost all visitors that I researched live in the Netherlands (88% for The Kitchen performances and 97% for Hamlet). There is a drastic difference in the answers to the question “How often do you attend performances in the Netherlands?”, which was still part of the demographic part.

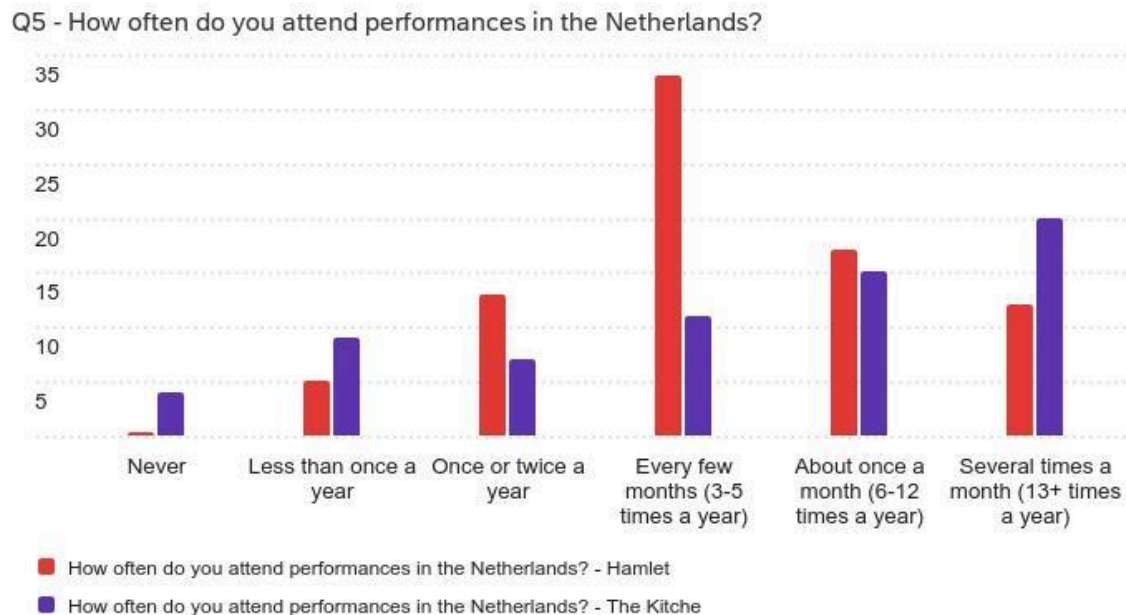


Fig. 4 - Attendance frequency between the two groups

The attendance frequency varies significantly depending on which show visitors attended. In the figure above, the attendance frequency of experimental visitors is skewed to the left, with most visitors attending the theatre several times a month (Fig. 4). Approximately 50% attend performances about once a month. The situation differs for classic theatre visitors. As indicated by the blue color in the bar chart, the most common response from these visitors was once every few months (3-5 times a year). This statistic will be crucial for later analysis. The final demographic question addressed which performance the visitors attended and was essential for distinguishing between the two main groups in this research. As mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, 80 visitors I researched attended a Hamlet performance, while 66 attended an experimental show. An important note here is that some experimental visitors attended more than one experimental show of The Kitchen. Additionally, 24% of

experimental visitors also attended a Hamlet performance, but for the sake of this research, I do not include them in the classic theatre group.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

In this study, I will adhere to ethical research principles by ensuring participants' anonymity, data protection, and informed consent throughout the research process. Before each type of survey, all participants receive a statement outlining the research purposes, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants also indicated their informed consent. No personal information (names, contact details, etc.) has been collected to maintain anonymity. I have stored the responses securely and analyzed them in a way that allows answers to be traced back to participants. The data will be used exclusively for academic purposes and archived after the research is completed.

## 4 Analysis

In this chapter, I delve into the results of the survey I conducted in April 2025 regarding different performances at Theater Rotterdam, specifically the Hamlet and The Kitchen productions. These represent two contrasting types of theater: Hamlet being popular and The Kitchen being experimental. My results are structured around seven central analytical themes suggested in the survey framework: awareness & ticket purchase behavior, price sensitivity & perceived value, motivation & expectations, experience & emotional impact, social & cultural capital influence, barriers to attendance & engagement, post-performance reflection & future engagement (appendix 1). In this analysis, I explore these themes one by one using various analytical tools.

Quantitative data from closed-ended questions is analyzed using Qualtrics Statistics software. I apply descriptive statistics (distribution, percentages) to identify patterns within different visitor groups. I separated the data sets from the two groups and compared them too each other in every question. Additionally, my survey includes a few open-ended questions that require a separate thematic analysis using Atlas.ti software. Responses to these qualitative

questions were coded into themes focusing on motivations, perceived risks, and theatre experience. Initial codes were created based on a survey structure, but later I refined them based on the content of the responses. Using two approaches to study this case allows us to find deeper insights and validation. Each theme will begin with a findings presentation, followed by an interpretation and qualitative insights, where applicable.

## 4.1 Awareness & Ticket Purchase Behavior

This first theme explores the visibility of the performance in the public space, key influences on the decision process to attend performances, and the timing of ticket purchases (behavior). These questions should help assess how different marketing strategies and visitor behavior vary between mainstream and experimental productions.

4.1.1 How did you hear about this performance? This was a multiple-choice question with four possible answers and an “others” option, allowing visitors to propose their source of knowledge about the performance they attended. The options included social media, word of mouth, the Theater Rotterdam website, and advertisements. The results varied slightly between groups (Fig. 5). The most surprising finding is the number of word-of-mouth responses. For both Hamlet and The Kitchen, it was one of the most frequent responses, but a more popular performance (44% of respondents for Hamlet compared to 33% for The Kitchen). Another surprising aspect is that the Theater Rotterdam website was the most frequently chosen answer by the Kitchen audience (38% of surveyed visitors compared to 24% for Hamlet). Classic promotion strategies through social media and advertising were both more successful with Hamlet visitors, with more respondents hearing about it from these sources (14% to 8% for social media and 15% to 3% for advertising).

Q7 - How did you hear about this performance(s)? - Selected Choice

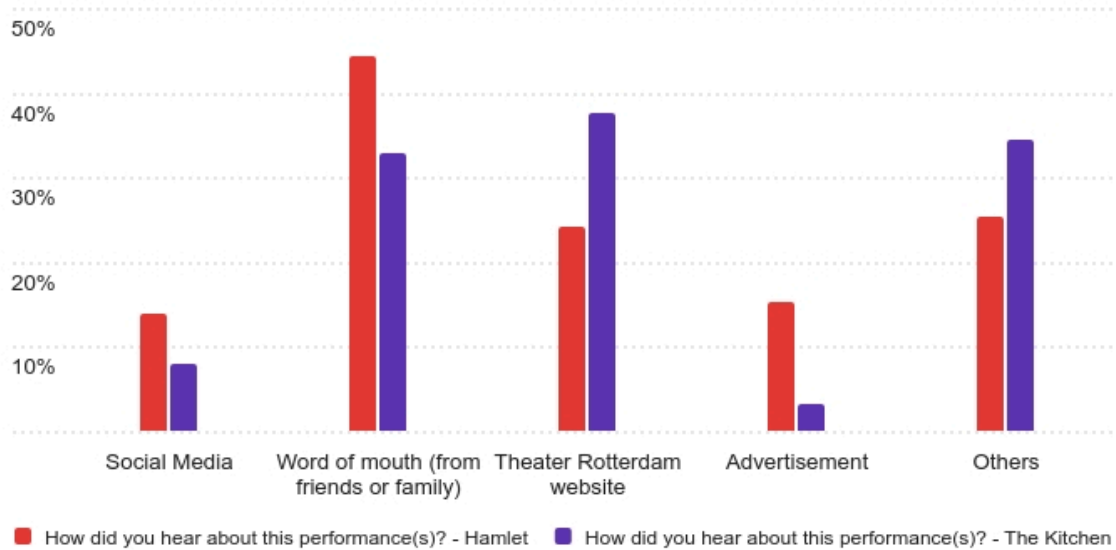


Fig. 5 – How did you hear about this performance? Answer charts

A short theme analysis of “other” responses suggests answers that I did not list, but they still connect to the categories I proposed. For instance, for Hamlet, visitors said they heard about Hamlet from the media, but not from social media. Few visitors heard about Hamlet from the newspaper and the program book. Other visitors either worked with the creator or the Theater Rotterdam institution before. However, the answers that The Kitchen visitors provided are transforming the overall results of closed-ended answers. Namely, as many as 11 visitors wrote in the “other” answer that it was a friend or a participant in the show who informed them about the performance. This makes word of mouth as meaningful as in the Hamlet case. Another popular “other” answer’s theme was professional ties. Few visitors worked or were doing an internship within Theater Rotterdam or The Kitchen production.

#### 4.1.2 What influenced your decision to attend?

For this question, the answers as visible on the graph were completely different depending on the attended performance (Fig. 6). I will start this question analysis with similarities. Pricing



and personal recommendation had similar importance for both Hamlet and The Kitchen visitors. In both cases, pricing was decisive only in 5% of the surveyed visitors, and personal recommendation was 38% for Experimental shows and 29% for Hamlet. The differences appear in the other three categories that I proposed. The most crucial difference is the answer to well-known directors and/or actors. Name recognition was important only for 9% of experimental visitors, while 48% of Hamlet surveyed visitors said that the name of the director or actor influenced their decision to attend. Similarly, the play's reputation was not important for experimental visitors (only 5% of surveyed visitors) while it was quite meaningful for Hamlet visitors (32% of surveyed visitors). It is possibly because The Kitchen performances were proprietary, so visitors could not hear about them before, while Hamlet is an old-time classic.

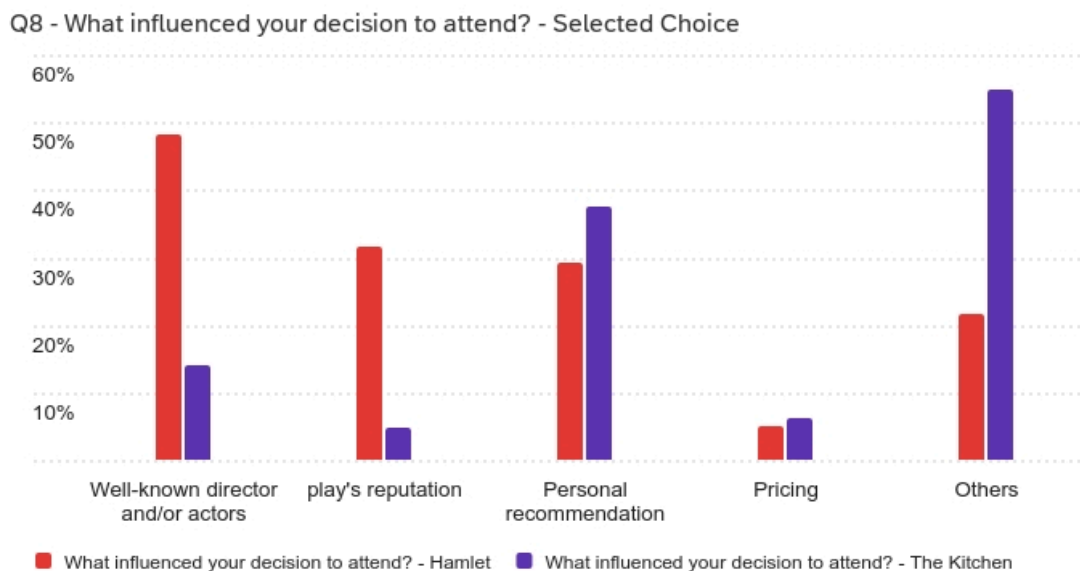


Fig. 6 – What influenced your decision to attend? Answers graph

As with the previous question, I gave a space to visitors to name their influence for attending the performance of their choice. For this time, coding gives some new insights for this question. For experimental performances, 10 people answered that a personal connection to the performer or team was a reason for attending the show. One visitor said: “My sister dances in it”. For others, it was a friend's performance. The second big theme is an

educational motive (8 visitors). Two of them attended the show because they also perform themselves and were looking for inspiration for their productions. In the case of Hamlet, open-ended responses create an extension for the “well-known director and/or actors” answer. The two biggest categories of other answers are “personal interest in the play or author (specifically Shakespeare rather than Erik Whien)” but also an “interest in production team or actors”. In total, it is 9 more responses for the well-known director.

#### 4.1.3 Do you buy your ticket in advance or last minute?

The last question of this section explores consumers’ behavior and planning. I wanted to check how far in advance audiences commit, which reflects their intention and spontaneity. I analyze this question as a behavioral indicator that complements the decision-making process. The results of this question show that for both groups, buying in advance is a default strategy (Fig. 7). For Hamlet, buying in advance is a more dominant group, with 68% of asked visitors buying in advance, only 11% buying last minute, and 20% variously. In The Kitchen performances, buying in advance was less popular (45%), with 17% last minute and 38% variously. The reason for this difference might lie in a premise for both shows. Hamlet had a big promotional campaign, so visitors were more likely when buy tickets just not to miss the opportunity.

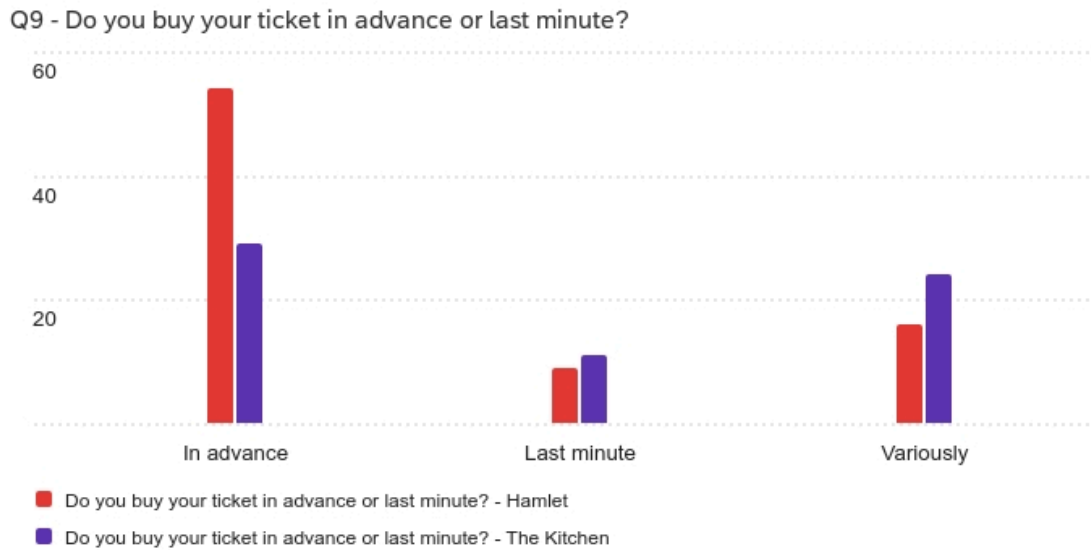


Fig. 7 – preferences for buying tickets

## 4.2 Price Sensitivity and Perceived Value

Moving from awareness to pricing, this next section explores how cost consideration influence the attendance of visitors and their perception of value. The survey contains four closed-ended questions without open-ended options; therefore, this part of the analysis is strictly descriptive.

### 4.2.1 How much do you typically spend on a theatre ticket per month?

This question gives insights into visitors' spending behavior that relates to theatre performances. It helps in assessing a general price sensitivity and differences within visitor groups (Fig. 8). For The Kitchen visitors, the biggest group of surveyed visitors spends between 0 and 10 euros per month on theatre tickets (36%). 28% of surveyed visitors spend between 11 and 20 euros, and another 18% each for between 21 and 30 euros, and more than 30 euros. These results show that the Kitchen group is a price-sensitive audience because almost two-thirds of visitors spend 20 euros or less on theatre per month. Another insight is that spending is rather evenly distributed, suggesting a diverse audience that includes various target groups. For the Hamlet audience, the situation is similar. 29% spend between 0 and 10

euros, while 38% (the largest group) spend between 11 and 20 euros. It indicates a higher spending audience where 60% of visitors spend between 11 and 30 euros, compared to 46% for the Kitchen. Hamlet is more appealing to a mid-range spending group with lower price sensitivity. The question suggests that pricing strategies and performance type influence audience composition.



Fig. 8 – spending on tickets per month

#### 4.2.2 Did ticket price influence your decision to attend this performance?

This question is to measure the direct impact of ticket pricing on attendance decisions. I aim to provide a measure for price sensitivity concerning experimental and mainstream performances. Results are visibly different for each type of performance (Fig. 9). For The Kitchen shows, 38% of respondents said “yes”, the ticket price influenced their decision. 43% responded no, and 18% answered maybe. So, in total, over half (56%) of the audience was potentially influenced by the ticket price (yes + maybe). Therefore, it is a supporting point for the interpretation that The Kitchen attracts a more price-aware audience that responds to its pay-what-you-want strategy. The situation is different for Hamlet visitors. Only 23%

answered yes, while the majority (54%) said no, and 23% answered maybe. It is clear here that Hamlet's audience is much more unaffected by the price factor. This supports the argument that mainstream theatre appeals more to price-inelastic consumers. They will attend the theatre with less focus on the pricing. Kitchen's flexible pricing draws visitors who are conscious about it, while Hamlet's tiered prices draw an audience less sensitive to cost.

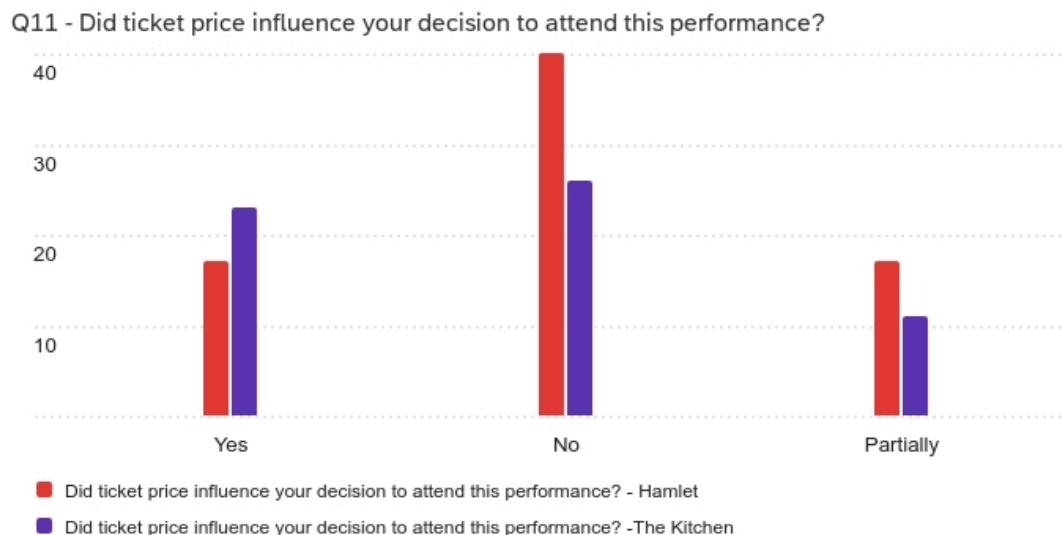


Fig. 9 – Price influence on attendance

#### 4.2.3 Do you think the ticket price reflects the value of the experience?

This question measures the perceived value of performances in a monetary context. It measures whether audience members felt that their price matched the artistic and emotional return they received (Fig. 10). It is a critical assessment of audience satisfaction, concerning the relation to different pricing models. The Kitchen surveyed visitors had a total of 44% positive responses (18% definitely yes and 26% probably yes), 30% were undecided, and 26% had negative responses (16% definitely not and 10% probably not). Nearly half the audience felt that the price matched the value, but high neutral and negative responses suggest uncertainty and divided perception of experimental performances. This might stem from the nature of experimental shows (challenging expectations).



Fig. 10 – Value of experience reflected in price

The results are slightly different for Hamlet, but with the same trends as The Kitchen. Positive response rate is a bit higher, up to 47% (definitely yes, 23%, and probably yes, 24%). There were 32% undecided responses and 21% negative responses, with 13% probably not and 8% definitely not. Fewer negative responses and more certainty in positive replies suggest that Hamlet’s pricing and content alignment were more obvious to the audience. The reason for that may lie in the audience’s greater confidence in the value of canonical works. These results support other research (Brilli & Gemini, 2018; Scollen, 2009) that suggested that the ephemeral nature of performance complicates value assessment in non-mainstream formats.

#### 4.2.4 Would you attend more performances if prices were lower?

This question challenges the visitors' price elasticity of demand. Question 4.2.4 builds on the findings of 4.2.2 (“Did ticket price influence your decision to attend this performance?”) by shifting focus from initial attendance decisions to potential increases in attendance frequency. There, I asked whether ticket price directly influenced the choice to attend a specific

performance (a snapshot of price sensitivity); here, I explore the elasticity of demand – whether a price reduction would lead to better engagement over time. It is crucial to understand potential barriers to repeat attendance and to shape an inclusive pricing policy. What is interesting is that the results for this question are somehow contradictory to previous statements (Fig. 11). For Hamlet, 42% of respondents would attend more performances if prices were lower. 37% answered maybe, and 21% answered no. Almost 80% of Hamlet respondents would or might attend more performances if prices were lower. Earlier responses said that this group is less price-sensitive, but these results suggest that even mainstream theatre audiences recognize price as a limiting factor.

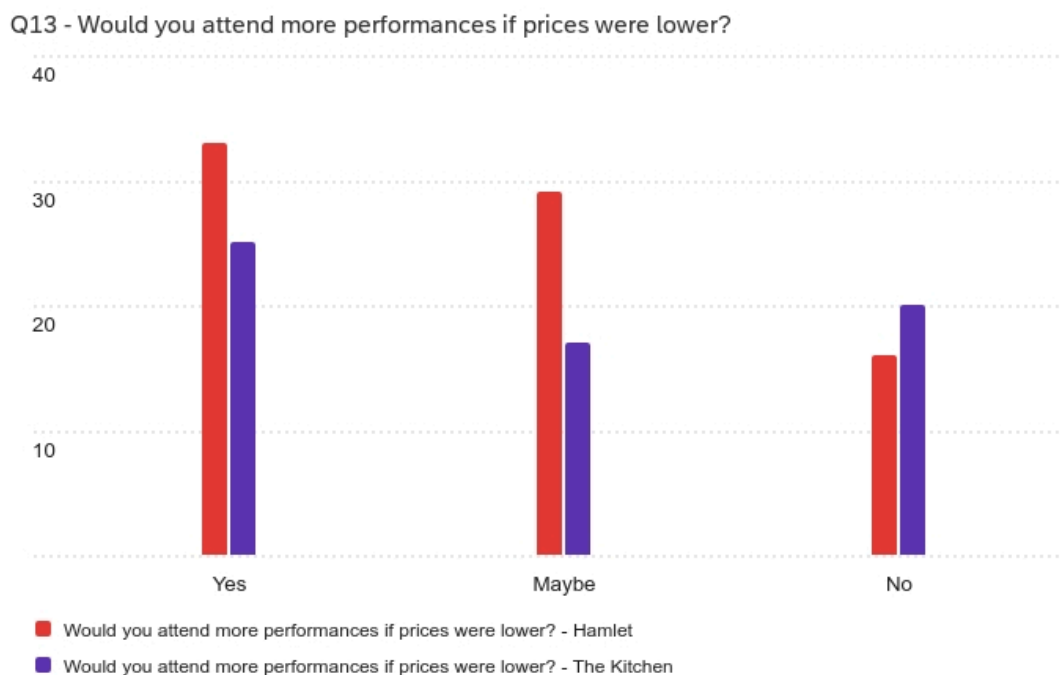


Fig. 11 – Attendance frequency according to price

For The Kitchen results are also a bit contradictory to previous statements. 40% of respondents would attend more performances if prices were lower. 27% answered maybe, and as much as 32% answered no. Therefore, comparing these two results shows that around 10% more respondents do not go more often if the prices were lower. The conclusion that might stem from this answer is that the pay-what-you-want model has already minimized price as a

barrier for many. Both audiences show a positive relationship between lower prices and increased attendance, but for different reasons.

### 4.3 Motivation and Expectations

This next section requires complete qualitative analysis to come up with an interpretation. In here, I served survey attendees two open-ended questions. These questions explored why they came to the theatre in their own words and what their expectations were before attending the show. Question 14 was: Can you name 3 reasons why you attended this performance? Question 15 was: What did you expect from this performance before you attended it? To analyze these questions, I applied thematic analysis using Atlas.ti software and came up with themes that differ between visitor groups. Most of the responses were in Dutch, requiring extra translation with Google Translate. Also, as expected, part of the attendance of my survey participants skipped the open-ended questions, but the answers provided by the rest still provide some useful insights.

#### 4.3.1 Can you name 3 reasons why you attended this performance?

	1 What motivate...	2 Why did you at...	Totals
	52	56	
○ Culture capital / educat... 38	29,33% 22	19,51% 16	24,20% 38
○ External reasons 10	8,00% 6	4,88% 4	6,37% 10
○ Interest in the Play / Art... 46	9,33% 7	47,56% 39	29,30% 46
○ Pricing 3	2,67% 2	1,22% 1	1,91% 3
○ Social Capital / Shared... 14	4,00% 3	13,41% 11	8,92% 14
○ Thematic Interest 28	32,00% 24	4,88% 4	17,83% 28
○ Word of Mouth / Reco... 18	14,67% 11	8,54% 7	11,46% 18
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100 % 75</b>	<b>100 % 82</b>	<b>100 % 157</b>

Fig. 12 – answers matrix made with Atlas.ti



The table here provides a summary of the codes and their frequencies within the two performances survey attendances (Fig. 12). I coded all the stated reasons with 7 main codes that reoccurred throughout the answers. They are cultural capital/education, external reasons, interest in the play/artist reputation, pricing, social capital / shared experience, thematic interest, and word of mouth/recommendation. First, I explore the Kitchen visitors' responses. Out of 66 respondents, 52 answered this question. The answers were coded in 75 codes since I asked for 3 reasons, so some respondents gave answers that matched more than one code. For the Kitchen audience, two dominating themes were cultural capital (almost 30% of answers) and thematic interest (32%). Examples of culture capital answers include school purposes or exploring new perspectives. Respondent A wrote: "(...) Inspiring intentions of the makers & players. They [performances] are not just plays; they deepen a conversation about existence." Thematic interest was specifically popular for the Language: No Problem performance since it has explored the Palestine situation during the Israeli invasion. Another Respondent B stated: "It is an important subject. There is not enough representation. I am interested in how much language is important for culture." The last code that stood out from the others was word of mouth. People shared that the reason they came from someone had recommended inviting them to be there. These answers correspond to a close question about how visitors heard about this show. But they also provide deeper insights for these answers.

Answers for Hamlet visitors are quite different from the Kitchen visitors. First, answers that dominated the table were connected to the theme of interest in the play/artist reputation. Almost half of the respondents (47%) stated that. This theme contains actors, the director, and the original Hamlet influence. The answer that summarizes this theme perfectly from respondent C is: "Well-known actor, often enjoys performances at Theater Rotterdam, curious about how an old play has been given a new look." As with the Kitchen performances, Hamlet was a reason for many visitors to extend their cultural capital or educate themselves (almost 20% of answers). Also, many more people from the Hamlet group stated that going to a performance was the reason to meet with friends or family (social capital theme, which adds up to 13% of answers). Surprisingly, the price theme was avoided

almost completely in these answers. Only 3 people in total stated they came for their shows because of the good price.

#### 4.3.2 What did you expect from the performance before you attended it?

	1 The Kitchen 50	2 Hamlet 52	Totals
Artistic Form: Dance / Physicality / Visuals 21	14,29% 10	17,46% 11	15,79% 21
Cultural / Political / Social Themes 8	11,43% 8		6,02% 8
Curiosity / Surprise Seeking 11	14,29% 10	1,59% 1	8,27% 11
Emotional or Inspirational Experience 13	14,29% 10	4,76% 3	9,77% 13
High Expectations / Performance Quality 16	2,86% 2	22,22% 14	12,03% 16
Influence from Reviews or Reputation 2		3,17% 2	1,50% 2
Language / Communication 3	4,29% 3		2,26% 3
Modern vs Classical Blend / Interpretation 11		17,46% 11	8,27% 11
No expectations 33	28,57% 20	20,63% 13	24,81% 33
Text-Driven / Literary Focus 15	10,00% 7	12,70% 8	11,28% 15
<b>Totals</b>	100 % 70	100 % 63	100 % 133

Fig. 13 – answers matrix made with Atlas.ti

The next open question of this section has more themes than the previous one. It was caused by the fact that some themes did not occur in both performances but were frequent answers for the individual performances (Fig. 13). However, despite more themes, I received fewer answers, which can be caused by participants' refusal to answer too many open questions (102 for this question compared to 108 for the previous one). As with the previous analysis question, I begin with a table that summarizes all the themes that emerged. Blank spaces mean a specific theme was found only in one group of visitors (either for experimental or mainstream performance). The answers that stood out for both experimental and mainstream performances were concerning having no expectations (20 answers for The Kitchen and 13

for Hamlet). This is a great argument for the ephemeral good characteristics. Respondents were not aware of what to expect, and that is why they chose to attend the show. What was often mentioned as a follow-up point, but only for experimental visitors, is looking for a surprise (n=10). One visitor (respondent D) answered:

“I expected nothing especially. As said, it was a surprise for me. I liked the experience, but the show was very terrible. I'm not sure if in other circumstances I would come to see a theater piece so particular that this one, but in terms of surprise, all I can say is it opened my mind and I became interested in seeing other shows like this one.”

So, despite not enjoying the show that much and being surprised by the content, this visitor still has the motivation to attend similar performances in the future. A point that was barely recorded for experimental theatre but stood out for many Hamlet visitors is high expectations about quality (14 visitors). Mainstream visitors are much more likely to expect that the show will meet their or reviews' expectations, which might also be caused by the pricing of Hamlet (in any situation, the price of going for Hamlet was higher than any of the Kitchen performances). For Hamlet visitors, it was also unique to mention frequently an expectation connected to the vision of the performance, which was a modern vs classical blend. Three main themes occurred exclusively for The Kitchen performances. I already mentioned curiosity, and now we can also add to this one cultural / political / social theme (n=10) and emotional or inspirational experience (n=10). The first of these two was specifically popular for the Language: No Broblem performance and its linguistic message. One visitor (respondent E) wrote about it, “[I expected it to be] politically charged, a combination of dance and theatre. Pain and connection.” Overall, these two open questions provided insights that are a good follow-up extension of the answers stated in the closed-ended questions.

#### 4.4 Experience and Emotional Impact

In this section, I explore how audiences experience and explore the performances emotionally. I focus on subjective engagement, emotional response, and memorability. In this section, I use quantitative indicators with qualitative reflections (Bryman, 2016). Emotional impact is crucial for theatre research as live performance depends on an affective connection between performers and spectators (Scollen, 2009). I proposed 3 questions for this section:

How engaged did you feel during the performance? (with scaled response), What aspect of the performance stood out the most? (categorical with open option), And would you recommend this performance to others? Why or why not? (scaled with open-ended follow-up question).

#### 4.4.1 How engaged did you feel during the performance?

This question, out of all this survey, has the most similar answers between experimental and mainstream visitors (Fig. 14). It is safe to say that for both groups, attending a theatre performance made them at least somehow engaged with the show (only 3 people I researched who went for Hamlet felt not engaged, and another 2 for The Kitchen performance). As argued before, engagement is a key indicator of theatrical success (Scollen, 2009). For Hamlet, 74% of respondents reported being either “engaged” or “very engaged”. This high score suggests a strong but traditional engagement with all-time classics like Shakespeare. For the Kitchen results are similar, “engaged” and “very engaged” combination (72%), but with a bit higher score for “very engaged” answers (30% for The Kitchen, to 26% for Hamlet). For Theater Rotterdam, this finding means that experimental and mainstream performances can coexist simultaneously. Engagement is a key indicator of theatrical success (Scollen, 2009). Therefore, these findings provide a strong foundation for audience development strategies.

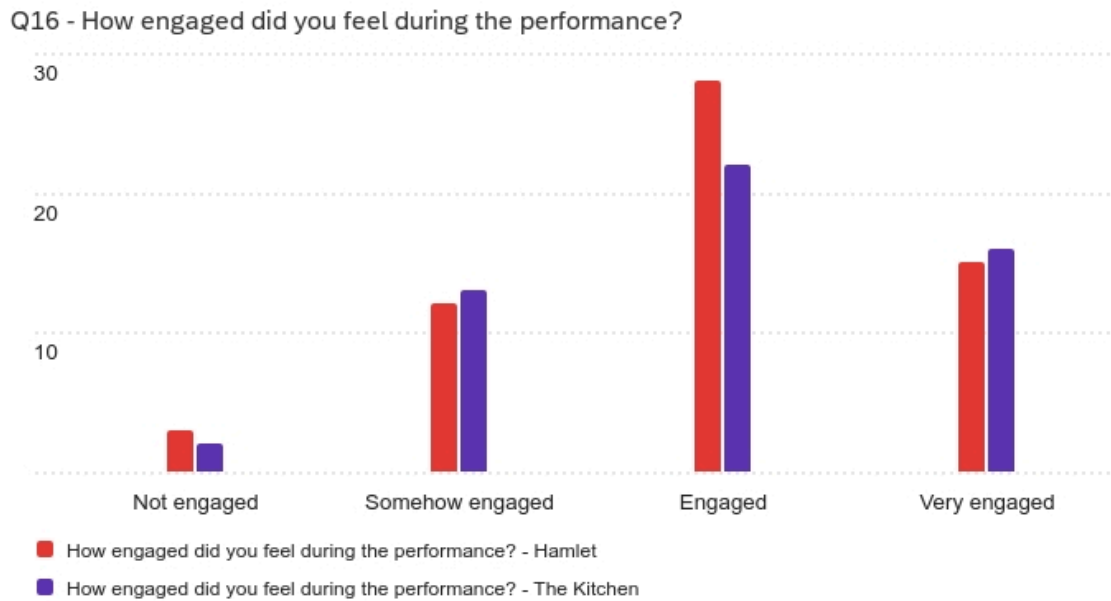


Fig. 14 – Engagement level during performances

#### 4.4.2 What aspect of the performance stood out the most?

This question proves again a great distinction in perception between experimental and popular theatre. With this question, I wanted to capture what audience members found most memorable or distinctive in the performance, and the answers differ drastically (Fig. 15). It shows that mainstream and experimental performances communicate different values.

Q17 - What aspect of the performance stood out the most? - Selected Choice

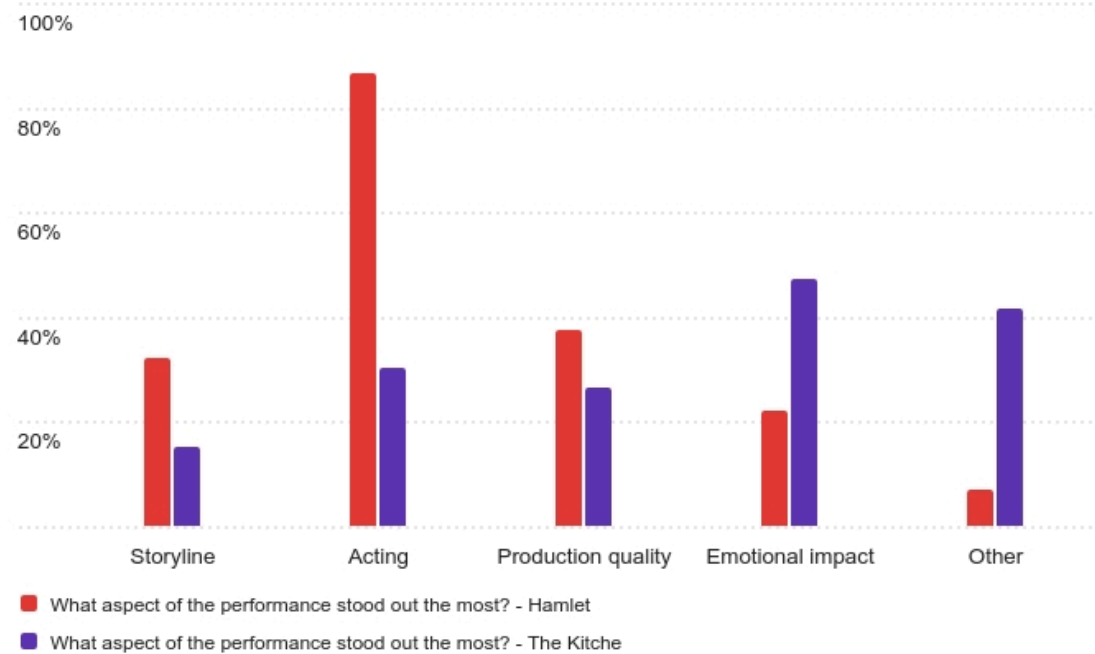


Fig. 15 – What stood out the most in the performance

First and foremost, the most outstanding answer to what stood out for Hamlet is “acting”. It stood out for nearly 90% of respondents. The follow-up answers behind acting consist of “storyline” and “production quality”, both around 35-40%. And then, “emotional impact” and “others” were selected very rarely. At first, the “other” option meant that I would follow with a short thematic analysis of the answers. In this case, I received 4 “other” responses for this question for Hamlet. All of them were concerned light and sound of the performance. Therefore, they can relate to the “production quality” answer. These results are consistent with the point I am making throughout this thesis. Hamlet in Theater Rotterdam had a classical structure and star-driven appeal. Strong actor reputation and a clear classical narrative formed a backbone for audience appreciation. Low emotional engagement might reflect intellectual engagement rather than emotional reflection.

The situation in The Kitchen performances presents quite the opposite of Hamlet’s vision. The emotional impact of these shows was the most frequently picked answer for this question

(almost 50%), but not on the scale of acting in Hamlet. “Acting”, “production quality”, and “storyline” were notably lower but still on a meaningful level (“production quality” with 26%, “storyline” with 15%, and “acting” with 30%). What distinguishes these answers from Hamlet is many “other” responses, which rose to 42% for the visitors surveyed (Fig. 16). In this case, short thematic analysis is desirable. It was 22 “answers” that add up to 42% of the Kitchen respondents. With the help of Atlas.ti I coded these answers into 4 extra themes.

	1 What aspect of...	Totals
	22	
<input type="radio"/> Atmosphere / immersion	4	4
<input type="radio"/> Movement / Expression	7	7
<input type="radio"/> Shock / Taboo	6	6
<input type="radio"/> Visuals / Aesthetics	6	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>

Fig. 16 – “other” answers themes

Movement and expression gather answers over gestures, embodiment, and choreography. One visitor listed what stood out: “Seemed improvised, interaction between performers, contact with the audience”. Visuals and aesthetics are a theme over technical aspects, scenography, and lighting. It can be treated as an extension of “production quality” from the main answer options. Shock and taboo were the most visible for the Shaking Shame performance with naked performers. The quote that illustrates this point is “Breaking taboos / countering the current trend of prudishness” (Respondent F). Lastly, atmosphere and immersion consider spatiality and immersive effects. For instance, “The small hall did its thing, and I felt very inside the play”.

#### 4.4.3 Would you recommend this performance to others?

The last question of the experience and emotional impact section measures overall satisfaction by asking about possible recommendations of the seen performance to others

(Fig. 17). Willingness to recommend reflects personal experience but also relevance and universality for others. It is a closed-ended question with a follow-up open-ended explanation. For those who answered “no,” I asked, “why not,” and for those who answered “yes,” I asked, “why?”. There was no follow-up question for the answer “maybe”.

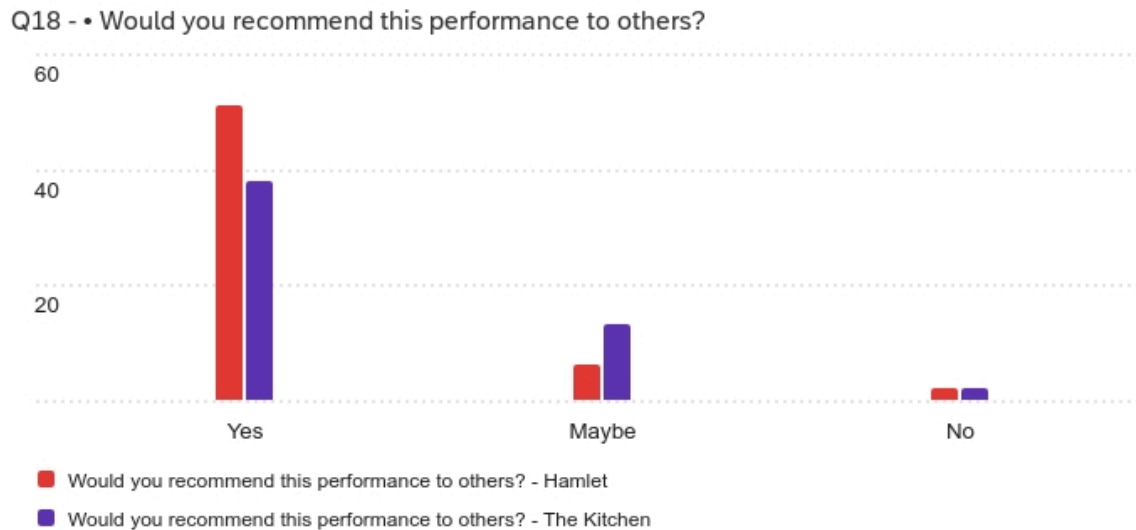


Fig. 17 – decision to recommend the performance

The first visible insight is that for both performances, only 2 respondents per show stated that they would not recommend it for others. It shows an uncontroversial assumption that, according to my respondents, theatre is worth recommending no matter what kind. As with the previous question, I skipped a part of analyzing the “no” open extension. For Hamlet, I received two follow-up answers for “no” answers: “[it] didn't touch me” and “[it was] very complicated”. For The Kitchen, only one follow-up “no” answer was recorded: “It didn’t reach me emotionally, and I was not stunned by the physicality.”

The difference between the two groups appears in the answers “yes” and “maybe”. For Hamlet, “yes” responses were high and quite low for the “maybe” answer. (n=55 and n=7). It is a bit different for The Kitchen. With still quite a high “yes” response (n=40), there is also a more hesitant response with “maybe” answers (n=15). With open-ended follow-up, I analyzed the reasoning behind recommending both shows, but it is impossible to do it with “maybe” answers for the Kitchen performance. The best interpretation is that moderate



hesitation reflects the niche or provocative nature of the performance or audience awareness that these kinds of performances are not for everyone.

	1 Hamlet 36	2 The Kitchen 27	Totals
Accessibility / universality 5	2,33% 1	12,12% 4	6,58% 5
Acting / performance quality 31	62,79% 27	12,12% 4	40,79% 31
Content / story / theme 14	18,60% 8	18,18% 6	18,42% 14
Innovation / originality 8	9,30% 4	12,12% 4	10,53% 8
Provoking / reflecting value 7	4,65% 2	15,15% 5	9,21% 7
Relevance social or cultural 11	2,33% 1	30,30% 10	14,47% 11
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100 % 43</b>	<b>100 % 33</b>	<b>100 % 76</b>

Fig. 18 – Matrix of reasons why visitors would recommend the performance

The number of answers for The Kitchen was smaller due to the popularity of the “maybe” answer (Fig. 18). Once again, acting was identified as the most crucial reason for Hamlet visitors to attend the performance, alongside unique scenography and light design. The acting aspect that was frequently mentioned was the chemistry between the father and son roles, performed by Roman and Jacob Derwig. This theme was hardly mentioned by the Kitchen visitors. The situation is quite the opposite for social or cultural relevance; this theme was the most popular among the Kitchen audiences. Similarly, accessibility and universality followed the same trend. The argument here is that mainstream performances are often perceived as a one-time experience, while experimental theatre carries an extended message that should be shared, which is the reason visitors recommend it.

## 4.5 Social and Cultural Capital Influence

One of the last sections of this analysis examines the role of social and cultural capital in shaping audience engagement. It draws on Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital and considers how prior exposure to theatre and familiarity with artists inform both accessibility

and interpretive depth. The questions of this section check whether visitors came with some knowledge about the performance or director, whether they attend similar performances, and how strongly theatre is tied to their social life and identity. These factors are crucial for creating these two separate profiles to understand the boundaries between audiences of mainstream and experimental productions.

#### 4.5.1 How familiar were you with the play/director beforehand?

Prior cultural knowledge is one of the clearest indicators of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). According to the literature review, familiarity with a play, director, or institution often reflects either educational background or theatrical experience. However, the results of this question show that the knowledge about the play/director is not precisely an indicator of high cultural capital. The results between these two groups are surprisingly distinct (Fig. 19).

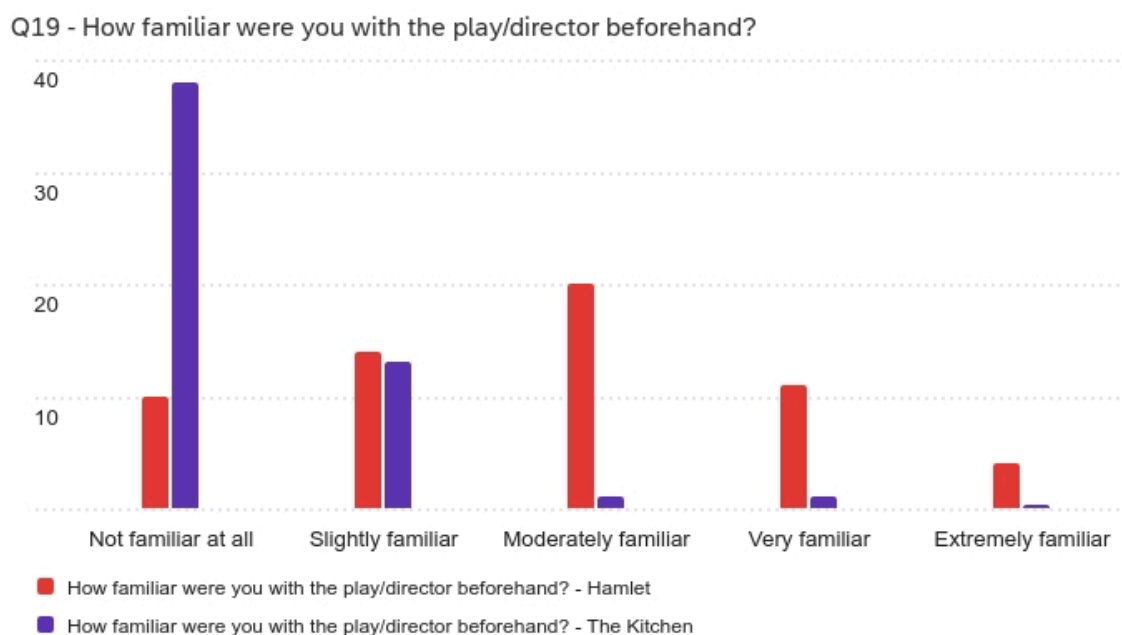


Fig. 19 – Familiarity with the performance

Most Hamlet attendees came with moderate to high familiarity with either the play or the director, with 60% moderately to extremely familiar. As it was frequently mentioned in the

previous question, Hamlet visitors were either aware of a backstory behind the show (Shakespeare's origin) or aware of the director/actors creating this modern version. Mainstream theatre supports the argument that performing arts reward cultural literacy and draw an audience with pre-established knowledge. However, it is not that obvious for experimental theatre visitors. Results for this question are almost completely one-sided. 72% of surveyed visitors never heard about the play/director they have seen before. Only 25% were slightly familiar with it. The audience for The Kitchen was overwhelmingly new to the director or concept. The reason for that lies in The Kitchen itself. It was meant to introduce new creators that did not receive national recognition (as Erik Whien, director of Hamlet). Visitors could not have prior knowledge about the show because it had not yet existed.

#### 4.5.2 Do you regularly attend similar performances?

Another idea for examining the influence of cultural capital on different theatre groups is to ask about visitors' tendency to attend similar performances to the one they have just seen. According to Getzner, regular attendance suggests integration into the cultural field (2020). Irregular attendance may point to novelty-seeking (as I presented in the previous question).

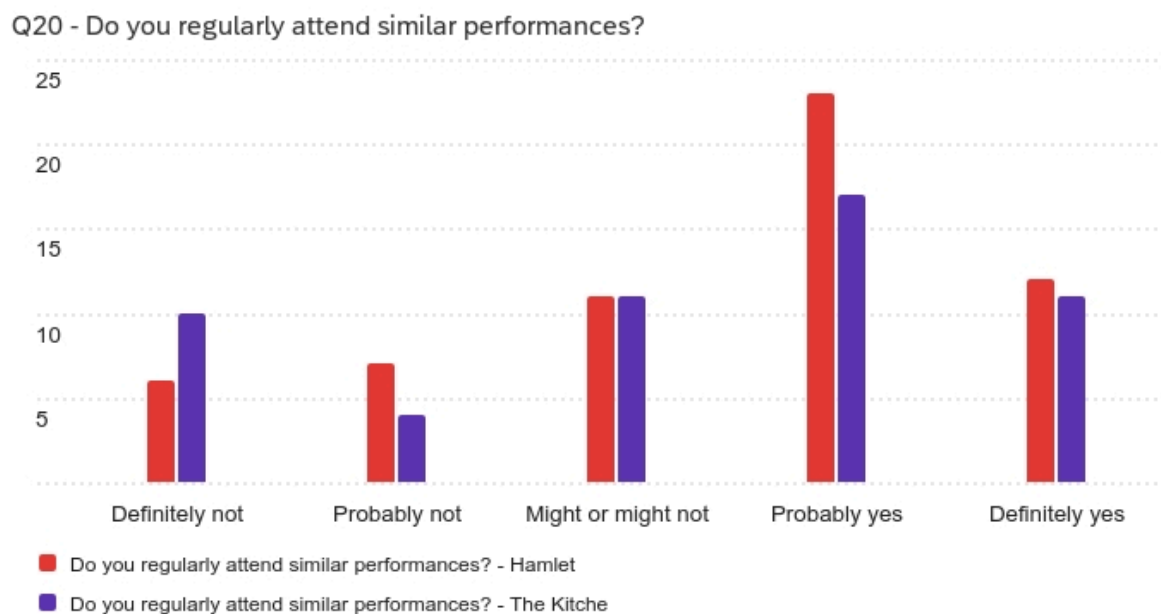


Fig. 20 – preference to attend a similar show

Almost 60% of Hamlet attendees report regular attendance at similar performances (“probably yes” and “definitely yes” answers together). Only 22% (“probably no” and “definitely no” answers together) said they are unlikely to attend a similar event (Fig. 20). Hamlet reinforces traditional cultural consumption patterns, drawing a public loyal to either the director, the actors, or the whole idea behind popular performances. Results are slightly different for the Kitchen visitors. First, there is a smaller group of people who can be labelled as frequent attenders (53% “probably” or “definitely yes”). Secondly, a bigger group of stated non-goers (19% for The Kitchen compared to 10% for Hamlet). Two points can be made of these results. The Kitchen is reaching a new audience; therefore, this new audience has not attended similar shows before. The second option is that the experimental, risk-taking nature of The Kitchen creates a less habitual environment for loyalty but more for open curiosity.

#### 4.5.3 Do you see theatre as an important part of your social life?

This section’s last question explored the social capital dimension, which is an important aspect of cultural participation (Fig. 21). How do individuals connect cultural experiences to their social identities and networks? If theatre is seen as socially important, it becomes a part of communal participation that supports long-term cultural engagement (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Results here are contradictory to the previous two questions of this section and support profiles of these two groups of visitors stated in the previous sections.

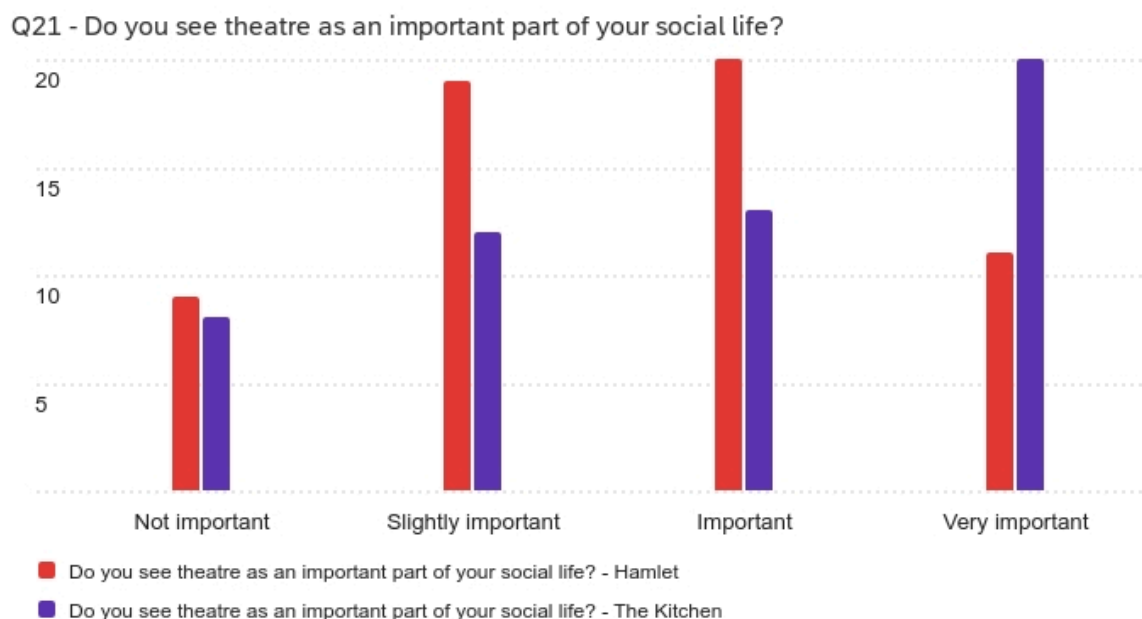


Fig. 21 – Is theatre an important part of social life?

For Hamlet attendees, only 53% viewed theatre as either important or very important to their social life. This result suggests that Hamlet attracts a more tradition-oriented audience. It can also mean that their motivation is tied to cultural engagement (cultural capital) rather than social ritual or group belonging (social capital). In contrast, The Kitchen has a visibly higher share (38%) of respondents stating that theatre is very important to their social life. This is a suggestion that the Kitchen audiences are more socially embedded and that these events worked as a shared experience. Results for this question also mirror the differences between the ages of these two audiences. Hamlet reflects more culturally obligatory engagement, possibly with older audiences, while The Kitchen reflects a social event, more closely tied to community belonging.

## 4.6 Barriers to Attendance & Engagement

In this section, I investigate the obstacles that frequently prevent audiences from visiting the theatre. I put extra attention on experimental theatre. I drew this part based on the literature around cultural accessibility (Brown, Novak, 2007; Hadley, Belfiore, 2018). I labelled both

practical matters (time, cost, language) and symbolic barriers (fear of complexity, lack of awareness). These barriers are crucial for understanding why certain groups might not be represented in cultural participation and whether this should change. I prepared two questions for this section. First, what factors prevent you from attending performances more often? It is a multiple-choice question with the “other” open-text option. Next one is, what would make you more likely to attend experimental performances? - an open-ended question that I coded thematically.

#### 4.6.1 What factors prevent you from attending performances more often?

This question identifies key obstacles to regular theatre attendance (Fig. 22). The responses reveal contrasts between Hamlet and the Kitchen visitors. For Hamlet, key factors that prevent visitors from attending more frequently are time (75% of respondents) and cost (31% of respondents). This is very consistent with the literature. Participation tends to be shaped by work-life balance and price perception (Brown & Novak, 2007). Hamlet visitors almost completely avoided factors like “language” and “accessibility” (12% and 6% respectively). It might be because this audience already feels institutionally connected to Theater Rotterdam and culturally comfortable. Two “other” answers concerned living in Amsterdam (accessibility/time) and preferring movies over theatre (“I’m not prevented from attending performances more often”).

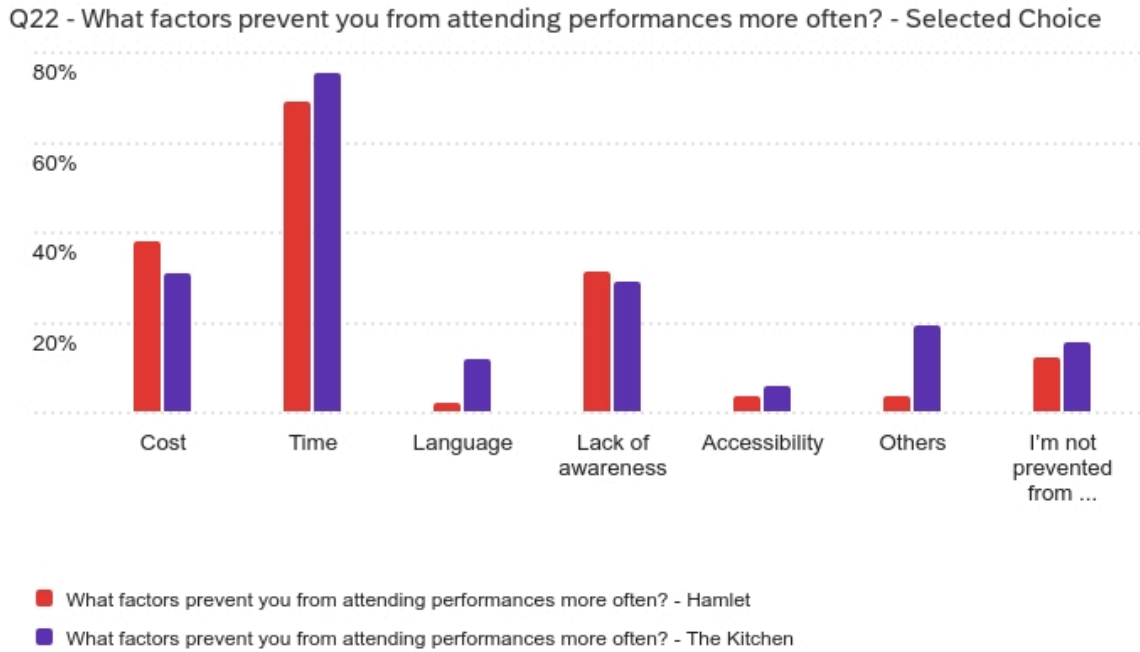


Fig. 22 What stops visitors from more frequency attending?

Answers from the Kitchen attendants are similar, with some exceptions. Like Hamlet, the overwhelming majority picked “time” as a primary constraint (75%) and “cost” in a second position (31%). “Language” and “accessibility” were more frequent compared to Hamlet. That might indicate that some attendees face non-traditional barriers. Barriers that are particularly relevant for a multilingual audience. Both Hamlet and The Kitchen reported a similar percentage of “no barriers reported” (around 15%). In case of “other” responses for The Kitchen, I registered 10 answers. 9 respondents specified other reasons. Some of them concerned time as well (“I work almost every day” or “Performances don't align with my work schedule”). Other few add to the lack of awareness (for example, “Sometimes I forget that it exists” or “Familiarity with the offerings”). Overall, The Kitchen shows greater complexity in reported barriers. It points out a more heterogeneous or less institutionally connected audience.

#### 4.6.2 What would make you more likely to attend experimental performances?

This open question, for a reason, does not have a distinction between experimental and popular performance. I wanted to ask both groups the same question to explore their perception of experimental theatre and check if they even want to attend it more often (Fig. 23).








		1 The Kitchen -...	2 Hamlet What...	Totals
		37	34	
<input type="radio"/>  Advertising / Visibility	24	31,71% 13	31,43% 11	31,58% 24
<input type="radio"/>  Affordability	10	12,20% 5	14,29% 5	13,16% 10
<input type="radio"/>  Already Engaged	6	9,76% 4	5,71% 2	7,89% 6
<input type="radio"/>  Clearer Content	5	4,88% 2	8,57% 3	6,58% 5
<input type="radio"/>  More Time / Scheduling	13	9,76% 4	25,71% 9	17,11% 13
<input type="radio"/>  Offer & Programming Format	10	19,51% 8	5,71% 2	13,16% 10
<input type="radio"/>  Social Invitations / Peer Influence	8	12,20% 5	8,57% 3	10,53% 8
<b>Totals</b>		100 % 41	100 % 35	100 % 76

Fig. 23 – Themes that summarize answers for reasons to attend theatre more frequently

Results are slightly different depending on the type of performance visited. But what stands out mostly in both groups is promotion and visibility. Two groups suggested that what experimental theatre lacks is better advertising and visibility. One suggestion that could be implemented, suggested by visitors, is: “More visibility with information about filtered performances. (Respondent G)” Theater Rotterdam could implement a filter that would help visitors find well-suited performances. It was also a similar number for the affordability theme. Most of these answers were “lower price” or “accessible price”. But some other, more creative answers suggested new types of promotion that could motivate visitors to visit more frequently. For instance, “the possibility to buy tickets Last Minute for a moderate price” (Respondent H) or “A kind of pass? I’m a student” (Respondent I). This suggests that visitors are into seeing more performance, but the theatre needs to provide a new creative way of



promoting it. Two themes that are slightly different between these groups are concerning timing and programming format. For Hamlet visitors, timing mentions were often concerning the fact of raising children and restricted leisure time compared to the younger experimental group. Offer and programming format concern interest in content that is not too academic or abstract, but also in what is offered and how it is curated. For example, including “side program” or “emerging makers”. Lastly, both groups placed little emphasis on the social capital aspect, and that peer influence is crucial for their attendance. A Hamlet visitor mentioned “more friends attending” while the Kitchen visitors said: “recommendations” and “being invited by friends”. This is a good argument for the fact that theatre is not only a cultural but also a social capital environment.

## 4.7 Post Performance Experience and Future Reflection

And here we arrive at the final section of my survey, but also a final section of this analysis. In this part, I reflect on visitors’ final thoughts on the experience and how they consider their future engagement with similar performances or Theater Rotterdam itself. This stage is vital for this analysis because it is a point to explore the long-term interest and feedback for the institution. In the first quick, closed-ended question, I asked directly about visitors’ willingness to attend a similar performance again. This is best done inside to learn about their future potential comeback. The second open-ended question works as a final feedback and reflection for the theatre itself. It invites survey attendees to offer suggestions for how Theater Rotterdam can better engage with its audiences. Together, these responses reveal not only satisfaction and willingness to return but also that Theater Rotterdam still has a lot of space for development.

### 4.7.1 Would you attend a similar performance again?

This question was the simplest way to ask about the prospects from a personal perspective (Fig. 24). Answers provided for this question were very skewed to the “yes” answer for both types of publics. This suggests that the need for theatergoing is beyond preferences about the type of show. For Hamlet visitors, 86% of answers (n=49) said “yes”, 12% (n=7) answered maybe, and 2% (n=1) answered no. For The Kitchen, there was no answer “No”. 85% of

asked visitors answered “yes” (n=44) and 15% said “maybe” (n=8). For both groups, I also provided the answer “I don’t know,” but no one pointed at it. This might suggest that visitors are rather decisive in forming their statements about future visits to the theatre.

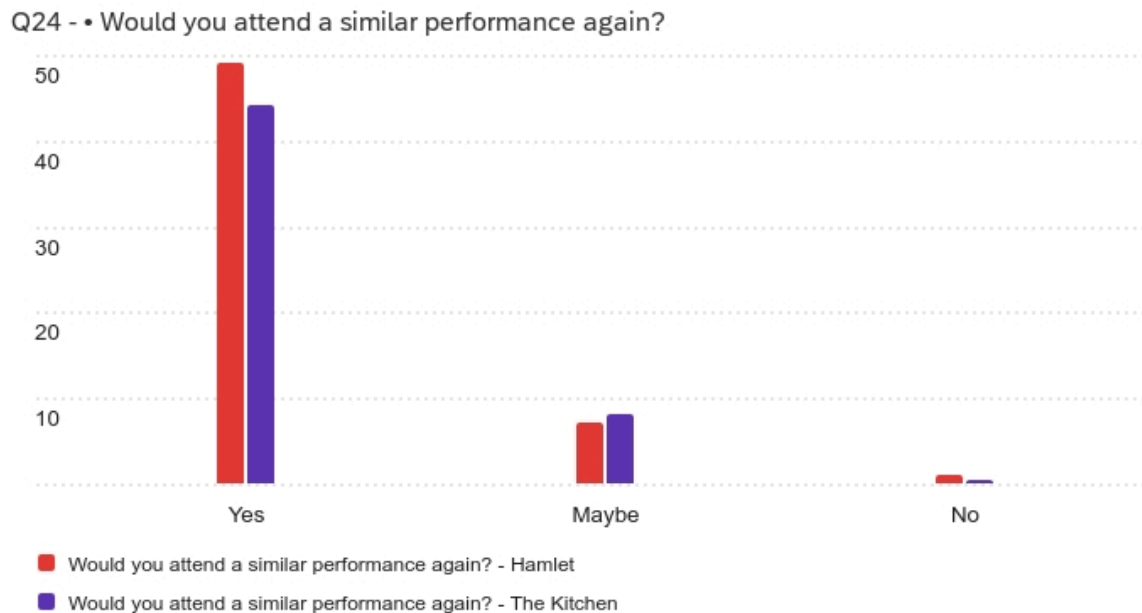


Fig. 24 – Would you attend a similar performance again answers.

#### 4.7.2 How could Theater Rotterdam improve its outreach or programming to engage more audiences?

It is time to analyze one last question of this survey that explores possible audiences’ ideas about the future of experimental and mainstream performances in Theater Rotterdam. Several recurring themes are having a comeback from the previous question (Fig. 25). First, the most dominant theme was marketing and visibility. It appeared frequently among both groups. Especially popular were answers about advertising on social media. From Hamlet respondents I received: “more posters in the metro and city, more advertising on Instagram,” “Instagram ads,” and even suggested “maybe advertising via YouTube or TikTok.” These answers were also echoed in The Kitchen part: “trailers, sneak preview, group tickets, festival-style marketing (5 shows for the price of 4, with friends).” In case of visibility, one

respondent admitted, “I didn’t know Rotterdam had such fire performances in theatres.” This suggests a disconnection between programming and awareness of it.

		1 Hamlet Recom...	2 Kitchen Recom...	Totals
		22	34	
○ Pricing / Accessibility	11	13,04% 3	21,05% 8	18,03% 11
○ Programming Content	16	26,09% 6	26,32% 10	26,23% 16
○ Satisfaction with current outreach	9	13,04% 3	15,79% 6	14,75% 9
○ Visibility / Marketing	25	47,83% 11	36,84% 14	40,98% 25
<b>Totals</b>		100 % 23	100 % 38	100 % 61

Fig. 25 – Themes for response ideas to create more theatregoers

The next highlighted theme was Price / Accessibility. Both groups agreed that the cost is sometimes too high to enjoy theatre performances more frequently. Kitchen attendees said: “pay what you can,” “make it accessible for new audiences by giving free tickets to those who can't afford them,” and “discounts to marginalized groups, political support to change the economic system we live in.” (Respondents J). Hamlet respondents made a similar suggestion, adding “occasionally offer a free performance in public space.” This idea would not only cut costs for visitors but also work as a visibility promotion for Theater Rotterdam. Another theme is Programming Content. This includes “program more text-driven performances,” “be clearer about what modern theatre really is (...).” (Respondent K) This theme also contain proposition for specific addition: “post-performance recommendations like ‘you might also like’.” Finally, a big group of visitors both of Hamlet and The Kitchen agreed that present outreach should not change anytime soon. They expressed satisfaction with the current promotion and marketing. “TR is already doing a good job,” “You’re doing great,” and “I travel far for the specials and find the atmosphere super.” (Respondent M)

## 4.8 Summary of the Results

This broad survey revealed distinct patterns in awareness, different motivations, price approaches, emotional engagement, and the role of cultural and social capital in Hamlet and The Kitchen visitors. Hamlet visitors were generally older, dominantly Dutch, and attended performances less frequently than The Kitchen visitors. The Kitchen visitors were younger, slightly more internationally diverse, and more culturally engaged daily. In awareness, Hamlet visitors relied on traditional marketing and reputation-driven channels, such as director and actor recognition, while The Kitchen performances attracted audiences through recommendations, personal ties to performers, and thematic interest. There was also a visible difference in price sensitivity. Both groups were aware that lower prices could increase attendance. However, the Kitchen audience was more directly influenced by pricing, likely due to the “pay what you want” strategy, while Hamlet attendees were more willing to pay standard rates, reflecting a Veblen effect (Veblen, 1899).

Motivation for attendance was also skewed depending on the group. Hamlet visitors were motivated by the canonical status of the play and recognizable actors and directors. Their expectations were centered on high artistic and narrative quality. In contrast, the Kitchen visitors emphasized cultural curiosity, political relevance, and openness to surprise and emotional risk. Many of them had no expectation before attending the show. Emotional response was high in both groups, but for Hamlet, respondents highlighted acting and stage design. For The Kitchen, attendees focused on emotional impact, taboo-breaking, and political experiences. In case of social and cultural capital, Hamlet visitors reported higher familiarity with the play or director and saw theatre more as a cultural habit. The Kitchen visitors often viewed theatre as a social and communal experience.

Answers were like each other around barriers to attendance. Both Hamlet and The Kitchen cited time and cost as the main barriers to attending the theatre more frequently. Kitchen attendants also mentioned issues related to visibility, programming clarity, and language access. After asking what theatre should do to make them and others more likely to attend, both groups pointed to visibility (promotion) and affordability (pricing). The experimental audience also mentioned better thematic making and community engagement. To sum up, my

data points to two coexisting but different audience profiles. These results are an empirical foundation for the next chapter of this thesis, which is the discussion.

## 5 Discussion

Now that we have explored every question in this survey, we can finally move to the discussion chapter of this thesis. In this chapter, I interpret empirical findings from the survey from chapter 4 through the lens of theoretical concepts I introduced in chapter 3. I revisit each of the core themes from the literature review – ephemeral goods, quality uncertainty, word-of-mouth, signaling, and competition in the cultural markets. This discussion explores how audience behavior corresponds to a broader perspective of cultural consumption. Every theme of this discussion has a set of questions that correspond to it. So, each paragraph has a structure of recollection of a concept from the literature review, presenting corresponding data, and confronting it with the concept. A central arc of this discussion is a comparative analysis between *Hamlet* and *The Kitchen*. It highlights key differences and similarities in how audiences engage with various types of performances. This structure allows for systematic interpretation of collected data shaped by expectation, demographics, and motivations, among others. I conclude the chapter with reflections on what these findings mean for Theater Rotterdam and how they can be applied in programming strategies and audience development.

### 5.1 Ephemeral and Experience Goods

As I presented before, live theatre is a classic example of experience and ephemeral goods. An experience product's main characteristic is that it cannot be valued before consumption. An ephemeral characteristic adds that the product is consumed only once; each performance is a bit different due to the nature of acting compared to film, which always looks the same (Towse, 2010; Wasserman, 2020). In the survey, I asked about the expectations before attending the show. This question was part of the motivation and expectation section, and answers were slightly different depending on the type of performance attended. *Hamlet*

visitors more often had clear and concrete expectations about the show. Typically, these expectations concern familiarity with the play, director, or actors. They referred to “good acting” and “monologues”. This reflects that mainstream performances reduce value uncertainty of experience goods by drawing on shared cultural references such as Shakespeare’s all-time classic.

In contrast, the dominant answer for the Kitchen visitors was “no expectation”. But, as they highlighted, a lack of expectation was often a reason for attending due to the need to be surprised by a performance. If expectations appeared for the Kitchen attendees, they were rarely concerned with familiarity with the performance but rather the message it makes (social, political statements) or the emotional impact it creates (“To be shaken in some ways and stimulated to open my mind and my feelings to anything (...”).

My results suggest that experimental performances like *Shaking Shame* or *Person Longing for Human* rely more on audiences that seek ambiguity and open interpretations, while mainstream performances require some level of familiarity and cues to engage their audience. The results are vital for cultural institutions like Theater Rotterdam, indicating that consumers of ephemeral goods are not homogeneous. Additionally, curating the experience depends not only on artistic vision but also on how it is framed and the preparation that bridges the gap between information asymmetry (Towse, 2010). However, as the Kitchen results demonstrate, this gap is sometimes necessary for the audience.

## 5.2 Quality Uncertainty and Performing Arts

As I explored in the literature review, an ephemeral good’s risk is quality uncertainty – the audience cannot evaluate the quality before attending due to the nature of performing art (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985). Therefore, live performances strongly depend on many types of trust mechanisms to attract visitors. One of the biggest cures to quality uncertainty is the reputation of an institution like Theater Rotterdam. It functions as a reputation broker (Towse, 2010). Other signals concern third-party motivation, pricing strategies, and peer recommendations - word-of-mouth.

A few questions in my survey concerned the trust mechanism and signaling. That includes “Name 3 reasons why you attend this performance” or “How did you hear about this performance(s)?” They offer insights into how trust mechanisms function across different audience groups. For Hamlet attendees, trust was largely built on institutional and reputation signals. Many respondents made their decision on the reputation of actors, the director, or the venue. Some mentioned a third-party endorsement in the form of read reviews from Theaterkrant or Volkskrant – two Dutch newspapers. This aligns with Spence’s signaling theory that institutional branding and media endorsements serve as credible indicators of quality (Spence, 1973).

The results for The Kitchen visitors suggest something different concerning the literature review. Word-of-mouth was the main source of reason to attend the performance, with less importance for marketing and promotion. Many visitors cited friends or family either performing or visiting as well as a source of information about the show. Also, monetary signaling was more crucial for experimental visitors, as more of them stated that price influenced their decision to attend (Fig. 9). This example illustrates that strong ties are more crucial for experimental visitors, and weak ties are more familiar for mainstream visitors. As Brown and Reingen (1987) argued, strong ties (friends, family) and weak ties (acquaintances, social media) both act as vectors of trust but with different effects. In this example, on different groups. However, my results stand in contrast to Granövetter’s (1983) argument that weak ties are essential in introducing new cultural products. In my research, strong ties were crucial to introduce The Kitchen to the larger public. These results show that trust building is not monolithic. It must be adjusted even within one institution, like Theater Rotterdam. It is shaped by the type of performance, the audience demographics, and preferences.

### 5.3 Social Influence

In a previous paragraph, I mentioned word-of-mouth and peer influence in making cultural decisions. These two mechanisms are part of a broader concept of social capital. The concept assumes benefits that are received and transferred through social ties (Putnam, 2001). Due to

the strong bonding characteristics, experimental theatre is a space where social capital can flourish. It becomes a form of social validation where individuals navigate uncertainty through the recommendations and behaviors of others.

I already showed that word-of-mouth was a critical factor in shaping both types of audiences. Here, other questions follow this argument and extend to a broader perspective on social capital. The first corresponding question is whether visitors would recommend this performance to others (Fig. 17). This question corresponds to the exchange aspect of social capital, specifically about transferring capital to others. Both groups presented a strong skew in recommending the performance they have seen to others. Therefore, the difference between mainstream and experimental performances does not concern their power in shaping the cultural capital and weak and strong ties.

The next question that concerns cultural capital is whether visitors see theatre as an important part of their social life (Fig. 21). What this question incorporates is considering a theatre as a melting pot space where social capital can grow through exchange (Putnam, 2001). Results for these questions show some distinction between the groups. While theatre is at least “somehow important” for the vast majority of respondents in both groups, it is “very important” mostly for experimental visitors. Therefore, I assume that for experimental visitors, a performance visit is more than a cultural experience, but a space for social development to a larger extent than for mainstream performances. Theater Rotterdam already uses this knowledge in the case of The Kitchen through offering a complementary drink and space for discussion with other visitors after the show.

## 5.4 Pricing and Perceived Value

In this paragraph, I consider how the pricing of performances in Theater Rotterdam influences the participation and motivation to attend of visitors. A lot of questions in my survey asked specifically about the price for attended performances. As I described in the literature review, due to the experiential nature of performing arts, pricing is not only an



economic aspect but also a cultural signal (Towse, 2010). Under uncertain conditions, price is one of the factors to determine the quality of a product (Spence, 1973). In the case of theatre, high price attracts the Veblen Effect (Veblen, 1899). It means that a higher price increases demand by reinforcing the symbolic value. But I do not mean that a lower price suggests the opposite. In case of experimental theatre, lower price means accessibility without belittling the perceived value of visitors (Langeveld, 2014).

In the question “Did the ticket price influence your decision to attend this performance?” most of the Hamlet visitors stated that the ticket price did not influence their decision. This suggests that cost did not deter attendance for this performance, and this group is to be considered price-inelastic since no matter of price, they will still attend. In contrast, more the Kitchen visitors stated that price influenced their decision to attend. These responses highlight the consequences of egalitarian pricing. It lowers financial and psychological barriers, making experimental theatre more accessible. The next question that considered a pricing factor was whether the ticket price reflects the value of the experience. The results showed that in both groups, the popular answer was “I do not know,” which means that compared to other products, experience goods are not that easily reflected in ticket price. What is more interesting is that in the previous question, experimental visitors stated that a lower price influenced their decision to attend. Here, a significant group stated that price definitely did not reflect the value of the experience. This suggests that perceived value in experimental contexts is more fluid and subjective, and not necessarily tied to conventional pricing logic.

The next similar question asked whether visitors would attend more performances if prices were lower. A much larger group of respondents in the Hamlet group said they would, while a larger group of The Kitchen visitors said they would not. Previously, I stated that Hamlet visitors are not that price-sensitive, and the price ticket mostly did not influence their decision to attend, but this question shows that the price is also a barrier for them to attend more theatre performances. Price was also often mentioned by them in an open-ended question, “What would make you more likely to attend experimental performances?”. Adding together

the conclusions appears that for performing arts, price remains a structural barrier for both types of visitors. Overall, these results suggest that price is not only a financial transaction. It is a complicated signal that communicates artistic value, the type of performance, and what type of public it will attract.

## 5.5 Cultural Capital Audience Composition

A few questions in this research were meant to explore the level of cultural capital among the visitors. As I explored before, cultural capital is a non-financial asset that determines the level of cultural consumption. It is a form of quantifying the cultural level of a consumer (Bourriaud, 1984). A classic definition of cultural capital assumes that it grows from consuming high-brow culture. However, a newer definition adds to that a concept of cultural omnivorousness. This assumes that cultural capital comes from consuming all kinds of culture without restricting to one specific category (Peterson, Kern, 1996). In this survey, I approached to measure the level of cultural capital to see its influence on visitors' participation.

The first question in the cultural capital section assessed the familiarity level of visitors with the play and the director beforehand. The results here show much higher familiarity with the play on the Hamlet side compared to The Kitchen. Familiarity with play is one of the determinants of cultural capital level, but it is not applicable in this situation. Hamlet visitors were familiar with Hamlet, which reflects their level of cultural capital. However, a lack of familiarity with The Kitchen creators by The Kitchen visitors does not mean a low cultural capital level. Moreover, it suggests an attempt at omnivorousness. They go beyond a classical theatre performance to extend their cultural capital. The second question was a follow-up to this case. I asked, "Do you regularly attend similar performances?" Here, both groups gave a univocal answer that they do. Only a few Hamlet visitors do not attend similar shows, and a bit bigger group of experimental shows visitors had not attended a similar performance before. However, newcomers to experimental shows are a consequence of the novelty of this type of performative event in Theater Rotterdam. Hamlet visitors represent a more

institutionally stable form of participation, while The Kitchen visitors mix traditional and experimental, popular and niche. Their theatre-going behavior is exploratory.

## 5.6 Motivation and Engagement

The last theme in focus in this research is visitors' motivation and engagement. Understanding why people attend is central to addressing attendance challenges. As I mentioned frequently, the motivation to go for a performance is far beyond consumption purposes. Motivation reflects emotional, cultural, and social needs. These needs are particularly visible for experimental theatre that resigns from conventional narration and aesthetics. Motivation for attending differs between the two groups I researched and is visible in the two open-ended questions I analyzed with Atlas.ti.

First, responses to the question, "Can you name three reasons why you attended this performance?" revealed a dissociation between the two visitor groups. However, despite varying answers, they can be grouped under one theme of cultural exploration. In Hamlet, this exploration reflects an interest in the play or the director. This was the most common theme in the answers collected for this question. For instance, three reasons from one participant were, "Interested in the play. Interested in the actors. I had never been in the building; I was also curious about." The tone of the responses was more grounded in cultural habits and artistic appreciation than in exploration. Responses from The Kitchen visitors suggest something slightly different. Cultural exploration remains the most popular motivation in their answers, but the justification for it varies. Rather than focusing on interest in the play, they are primarily drawn to the themes and messages that extend far beyond the play itself. The Kitchen responses tend to be more emotionally charged. Such emotional responses often serve as a catalyst for post-show discussion and word-of-mouth sharing (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003).

The second question that concerns motivation and engagement is "What would make you more likely to attend experimental performances?" I wanted to explore the potential barriers and motivators of visitors. Both Kitchen and Hamlet visitors highlighted a need for better

promotion of such kinds of performances. This was the most popular theme for both groups. Also, both groups mentioned better accessibility in the form of pricing, which means that visitors often see the theatre as too expensive an experience. What was more visible for The Kitchen visitors was social connection seeking. A few mentioned that they would attend more performances if they had company to go with and discuss. Theater Rotterdam should foster this connection with more strategies for matching different visitors that go beyond the strategies they already apply (blind dates event, for example).

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis explored the research question: **What factors affect ticket sales, audience participation, and motivation in Theater Rotterdam's experimental and lesser-known productions, and how does it compare to mainstream performance?** I applied a comparative case study between two performances in Theater Rotterdam, Hamlet and The Kitchen, in April 2025. I collected 146 survey responses, with 80 from Hamlet and 64 from The Kitchen. The findings from that research show that audiences for experimental and mainstream theatre differ across various dimensions. This includes motivations, pricing sensitivity, and collected culture and social capital. Hamlet mostly attracts an audience aware of the director, actors, and play. They respond better to structured marketing. Their profile confirms the role of signaling mechanisms - institutional reputation, known directors, and tiered pricing.

The Kitchen, so experimental performances, succeeded with different channels such as flexible pricing, peer recommendations (friends, family), and emotion-based engagement. Its audience was younger, more diverse, more international, and more motivated by curiosity and communal experience. Mainstream productions benefit from clear symbolic and economic signals. Experimental performances rely on interpersonal trust and cultural exploration. Word-of-mouth played a decisive role in audience development for The Kitchen, and pricing strategies (pay what you want) were effective in lowering entry barriers. For The Kitchen, emotional engagement and a need to extend cultural capital were the main motivations to participate in an experimental performance.

To summarize, whether Theater Rotterdam's productions receive a "Curtain Call" or face a "Close Call" depends on many factors. Most importantly, it depends on how well they balance diverse audience dynamics—embracing both the true appeal of mainstream theatre and the bold, exploratory spirit of experimental performances to secure their future on the stage and space in the Rotterdam cultural center.

## 6.1 Limitations

Despite the insights this study provides, it also has several limitations that need to be considered. The most important thing is sample size. It is sufficient for a case study but cannot be generalized to a broader population. The second issue is the nature of sampling. This study applied convenience sampling (QR code distributed personally after the shows). Consequently, the study contains selection bias, and it may over-represent more engaged or motivated visitors. Also, one theme was avoided for me and not measured deeply, which is internal and external competition as a factor for participation. The study focuses on a single institution of Theater Rotterdam, and only two programs it had. It complicates the applicability to other settings with different cultural or institutional contexts.

## 6.2 Future Research Suggestions

Despite its limitations, this research should be a good proposition for other researchers to develop further with a deeper investigation. The first suggestion is to make it more inferential and statistically comparative rather than descriptive. Also, a natural step would be a longitudinal study. It would examine how experimental theatre attendance evolves, and whether first-time visitors return. Before applying the survey method, I was considering stated and revealed preferences research (Adamowicz et al., 1993). It is a mix of ethnographic and quantifiable methods. A revealed and stated preferences research design incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methods, making it a mixed research method. Revealed preferences design has a quantitative nature. It is revealed by calculable data based on actual behavior, such as the choices consumers make in existing markets

(Adamowicz et al., 1993). In the example of theatre, this data appears in ticket sales, attendance records, or audience segmentation based on behavior.

In contrast, stated preference design is based on hypothetical choices, in which respondents are asked to choose a simulated environment. This qualitative design captures the audience's perspective and perceptions in their own words (Adamowicz et al., 1993). Another suggestion would be to conduct comparative research within various institutions or explore a digital platform in the form of a data analysis study.

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## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Survey structure

#### Introduction

. Welcome to my Survey!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research. This study is part of my Master's thesis in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship. I conducted it in collaboration with Theater Rotterdam. The purpose of this research is to understand the factors that influence ticket sales and audience participation in both mainstream and experimental theatre productions.

Your responses will remain completely anonymous and confidential. All data collected will be used only for academic purposes and shared with Theater Rotterdam in an discussed format. Once analysed, the data will be securely archived.

The survey will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. By clicking "Next," you agree to participate in this research. If you decide to change your answer you can comeback

to question you already answered. You can also decide to skip questions you do not want to answer.

Your insights are very valuable, and I generously appreciate

your contribution! Szymon Zbiegniewski

You can contact me about this survey under this mail: [sz.zbieg@gmail.com](mailto:sz.zbieg@gmail.com)

## 1. Demographic questions

Q1. Age

Q2. Gender identity

Male

Female

Other

Prefer not to say

Q3. Education Level

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Others

Prefer not to say

Q4. Nationality

Dutch

International

Q5. Place of Residency

Rotterdam

Somewhere else in the Netherlands

Somewhere else in European Union

Others

Q5. How often do you attend performances in the Netherlands?

Never

Less than once a year

Once or twice a year

Every few months (3-5 times a year)

About once a month (6-12 times a year)

Several times a month (13+ times a year)

Q6. Which of these performances in Theater Rotterdam you attended or planning to attend?

Hamlet

Language: No Problem

Person Longing for Human

Shaking Shame

Other performance

None

## 2. Awareness & Ticket Purchase Behavior

Q7. How did you hear about this performance(s)?

Social Media

Word of mouth (from friends or family)

Theater Rotterdam website

Advertisement

Others

Q8. What influenced your decision to attend?

Well-known director and/or actors

Play's reputation

Personal recommendation

Pricing

Others

Q9. Do you buy your ticket in advance or last minute?

In advance

Last minute

Variously

### 3. Price Sensitivity & Perceived Value

Q10. How much do you typically spend on a theatre ticket per month?

0-10 euro

11-20 euro

21-30 euro

More than that

Q11. Did ticket price influence your decision to attend this performance?

Yes

No

Partially

I don't know

Q12. Do you think the ticket price reflects the value of the experience?

Definitely not

Probably not  
Might or might not  
Probably yes  
Definitely yes

Q13. Would you attend more performances if prices were lower?

Yes  
Maybe  
No

#### 4. Motivation & Expectations

Q14. Can you name 3 reasons why you attended this performances?

Q15. What did you expect from this performance before you attended it?

#### 5. Experience & Emotional Impact

Q16. How engaged did you feel during the performance?

Not engaged  
Somehow engaged  
Engaged  
Very engaged

Q17. What aspect of the performance stood out the most?

Storyline  
Acting  
Production quality  
Emotional impact

Other

Q18. • Would you recommend this performance to others?

Yes

Maybe

No

Q18a. Why would you recommend it?

Q18b. Why wouldn't you recommend it?

## 6. Social & Cultural Capital Influence

Q19. How familiar were you with the play/director beforehand?

Not familiar at all

Slightly familiar

Moderately familiar

Very familiar

Extremely familiar

Q20. Do you regularly attend similar performances?

Definitely not

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes

Q21. Do you see theatre as an important part of your social life?

Not important

Slightly important

Important

Very important

## 7. Barriers to Attendance & Engagement

Q22. What factors prevent you from attending performances more often?

Cost

Time

Language

Lack of awareness

Accessibility

Others

I'm not prevented from attending performances more often

Q23. What would make you more likely to attend experimental performances?

## 8. Post-Performance Reflection & Future Engagement

Q24. • Would you attend a similar performance again?

Yes

Maybe

No

I don't know

Q25. • How could Theater Rotterdam improve its outreach or programming to engage more audiences?

Powered by Qualtrics

## 8.2 AI Declaration

# Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Course Assignments

### **Student Information**

Name: Szymon Zbiegniewski

Student ID: 667151

Course Name: Master Thesis Project

Instructor Name: Frans Brouwer

Assignment Title: Master Thesis – Draft Version

Date: 13.06.25

Declaration:

### **Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools**

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot)
- Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL)
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books



☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [Grammarly, ChatGPT], in the process of creating parts or components of my course assignment. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of the assignment.

#### **Extent of AI Usage**

☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the assignment were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix. I believe that this results are not a danger to academic integrity and Erasmus University should be more prepared for an fast-pace growth of AI tools.

#### **Ethical and Academic Integrity**

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: Szymon Zbiegniewski  
Date of Signature: 13.06.25

## 🧑🏻 Age Summary – Hamlet Visitors (n = 93)

Extracted from: dashboard-export-11-00-am

- **Age range:** 16 to 75 years
- **Notable clusters:**
  - Strong representation in 20s and 30s
  - Many visitors in their 50s–60s
- **Estimated median age:** ~34–36
- **Seniors (60+):** About 10–12 people
- **Younger participants (under 25):** Around 20 respondents

🔍 **Insight:** This is a **mixed-age audience**, leaning slightly older, with a notable presence of theatre-savvy adults and retirees, but still some young attendees, likely due to educational or cultural interest in Shakespeare.

## 🧑🏻 Age Summary – Experimental Theatre Visitors (n = 70)

Extracted from: dashboard-export-11-03-am

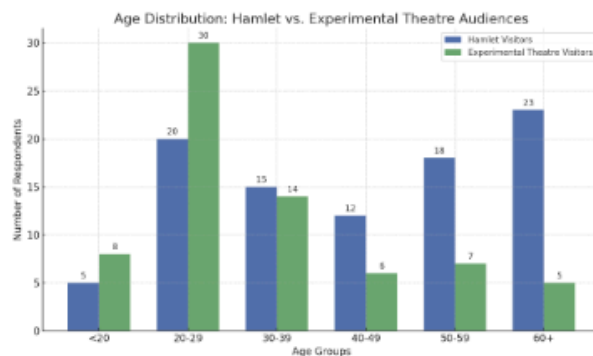
- **Age range:** 17 to 75 years
- **Dominant age groups:**
  - 20s to early 30s were highly dominant
  - Fewer respondents in the 50+ range
- **Estimated median age:** ~28–30
- **Seniors (60+):** ~6–8 people
- **Younger participants (under 25):** Over 25 respondents

🔍 **Insight:** The experimental audience skews **younger**, with a majority in the **student/early-career bracket**, supporting your assumption that this group may be more culturally omnivorous, exploratory, and price-sensitive.

Would you like a histogram or bar chart showing both distributions side by side?

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A bar chart pls



Here's your bar chart comparing the **age distribution** of Hamlet and Experimental Theatre visitors. As you can see:

- **Experimental audiences** skew younger, especially in the 20–29 group.
- **Hamlet audiences** have more representation in the 50–60+ range.

Would you like the same style of chart for another demographic, like education or ticket buying habits? [\[?\]](#)